

02620

epic

ILLUSTRATED

special preview
this issue:

DUNE
and
2010

plus:

JOHN BYRNE
TERRY AUSTIN
BILL SIENKIEWICZ
DAVE SIM



THE LAST GALACTUS STORY

CHAPTER THREE RETURN OF THE EXILE

THE SHIP IS TWENTY BILLION YEARS OLD, YET IT GLEAMS AS IF NEWLY FORMED FROM SHIMMERING STAR-STUFF

LARGE ENOUGH THAT ITS PASSING WARPS THE BOUNDARIES OF GRAVITY FIELDS, AS THE FEEBLE TUG OF EVEN THE TINIEST MOON ALTERS ALMOST IMPERCEPTIBLY THE PATH DESCRIBED BY ITS PARENT WORLD...

...YET SMALL ENOUGH TO PASS UNNOTICED AGAINST THE ENDLESS BLACKNESS OF ITS NATIVE SEAS--SPACE.

OLDER, ALMOST, THAN THE OLDEST LIFE IN THE UNIVERSE IT DRIFTS BETWEEN THE SWIRLING WHIRLPOOLS OF THE GALAXIES, AND NO MIND HAS WORDS TO SAY WHAT POWER MAKES IT MOVE.

SUFFICE TO SAY IT MOVES BECAUSE ITS MASTER WISHES IT TO MOVE, AND LITTLE CAN DENY HIS WILL.

HE IS GALACTUS...

AND THIS DAY HE
IS PUZZLED...

WHAT HAS
HAPPENED HERE,
MASTER? HOW
CAN THIS WHOLE
GALAXY HAVE
BEEN SHATTERED
--THIS, AND
OTHERS LIKE
IT?

THAT I DO NOT KNOW,
LOYAL HERALD. THERE IS A
FORCE ABROAD IN THE UNIVERSE
THAT IS BEYOND EVEN THE
KNOWING OF GALACTUS.

I AM OLDER THAN THE
STARS, OLDER THAN TIME
ITSELF. I HAVE CROSSED AND
DECROSSED ALL THE MYRIAD
PATHWAYS OF THIS REALITY,
YET NEVER IN ALL MY
JOURNEYING HAVE I
ENCOUNTERED SUCH
AS THIS.

THERE IS ANGUISH HERE,
NOVA. THERE IS PAIN BEYOND
COMPREHENSION. THE SCREAMS
OF UNCOUNTED BILLIONS
ECHO THROUGH THE
STAR-WAYS.

I HAD THOUGHT TO HAVE
SEEN ALL THE FACES OF MY
DARK SISTER, DEATH, BUT THIS...
IN THIS OLD UNIVERSE, THIS
IS SOMETHING NEW!



BEHOLD!

COMPRESSED UPON THE
SCREEN OF MY SCANNER, THE
GALAXIES THAT LIE BEFORE US--
A STRING OF SHATTERED GEMS,
ACROSS THE NIGHT.

AND AT THE END, AS YET
UNBROKEN, THE GALAXY OF
YOUR BIRTH, NOVA.
THE MILKY WAY.



THE MILKY WAY...?

A TORRENT OF ANCIENT MEMORIES BURSTS FROM THE LOCKED PLACES DEEP WITHIN HER MIND.

MASTER, MAY... MAY I FLY ON AHEAD... TO INVESTIGATE...?

PERHAPS HE SENSES THERE IS MORE TO HER FEELINGS THAN IS EXPRESSED IN HER WORDS. IF SO GALACTUS DOES NOT COMMENT. INSTEAD.



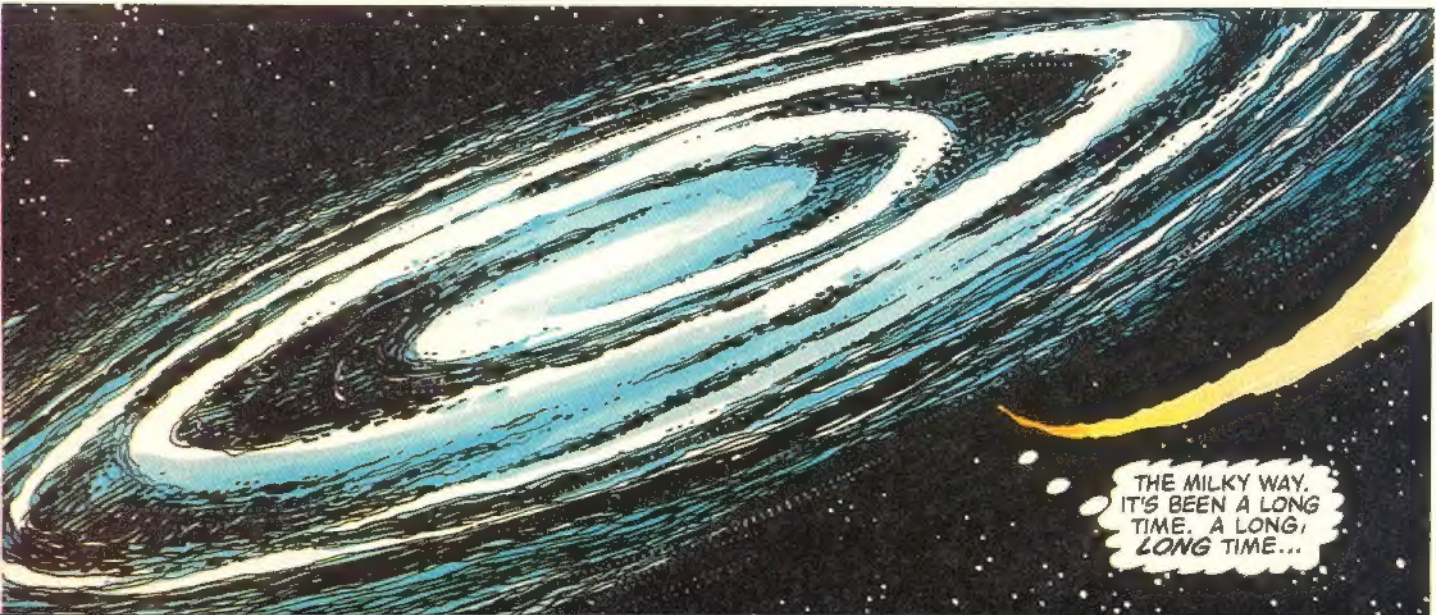
GO-- LOYAL HERALD, AND GALACTUS SHALL FOLLOW.

BUT HAVE A CARE, THERE MAY BE DANGERS HERE NOT EVEN YOUR POWER CAN COUNTER.

SPACE AND TIME RESHAPE THEMSELVES TO HER WILL. THE WOMAN CALLED NOVA PLUNGES THROUGH INFINITY...



UNTIL...



THE MILKY WAY. IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME. A LONG, LONG TIME...

THE FACE OF THE GALAXY HAS CHANGED MUCH SINCE LAST SHE PASSED THIS WAY.

THE ONCE-BUT-NO-LONGER FAMILIAR STARFIELDS HAVE NOT STOPPED THEIR RELENTLESS MARCH ACROSS THE HEAVENS.

YET ONE WHO HAS NAVIGATED ACROSS ALL CREATION DOES NOT NEED THE OLD SHAPES OF THE CONSTELLATIONS TO GUIDE HER.

INSTINCTIVELY, UNERRINGLY, SHE SEEKS OUT ONE PARTICULAR YELLOW STAR, SEEMINGLY UNCHANGED FROM THE LAST TIME SHE SAW IT.

IT WILL BE MANY THOUSANDS OF MILLIONS OF YEARS YET, BEFORE THIS BLAZING GLOBE BLOATS TO A SLUGGISH RED GIANT.

AND HERE, STILL SCRIBING ITS SEEMINGLY ETERNAL PATH SOME NINETY-FIVE MILLION MILES FROM ITS SOLAR PRIMARY, A SMALL BLUE SPHERE THAT WAS ONCE HOME TO A RACE CALLED MAN.

THE PLANET EARTH.



DOWN THROUGH SOFT WHITE CLOUDS
SHE DROPS, HER HEIGHTENED SENSES
PROBING, REJOICING...

FOR SHE FINDS HER ERSTWHILE
HOMEWORLD MUCH AS SHE LEFT
IT, TEEMING WITH LIFE.

BUT WHAT
LIFE!?

IT'S... CHANGED.
HOW COULD I HAVE
DOUBTED THAT IT
WOULD AFTER A
HUNDRED MILLION
YEARS!





CONTINUAL DRIFT HAS CARRIED THE LAND MASSES OUT OF ALL HOPE RECOGNITION. BY THE TIME OF YEAR AND PLANETARY ORIENTATION TO THE PRIMARY I'D GUESS I'M STANDING SOMEWHERE NEAR WHAT USED TO BE FLORIDA.

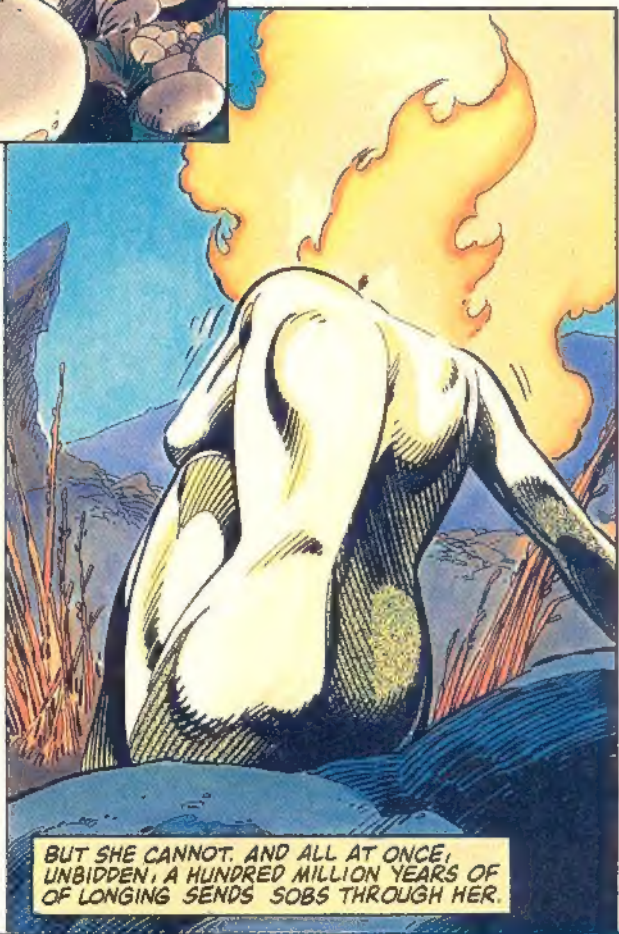
BUT FLORIDA NEVER HAD MOUNTAINS LIKE THAT, OR THIS KIND OF FLORA.

A HUNDRED MILLION YEARS AS FAITHFUL SERVANT TO GALACTUS HAS TAUGHT HER MUCH. SHE FEELS IN HER HEIGHTENED AWARENESS THE UNIQUE SONG OF EVERY WORLD, THE SPECIAL SYMPHONIES OF LIFE AND PLANET.

AND THE SONG OF THE EARTH IS FOREIGN, AS STRANGE AND ALIEN TO HER AS THOSE OF A BILLION DISTANT WORLDS SCATTERED ACROSS THE UNIVERSE.



THE SOFT BREEZES BRING A THOUSAND UNKNOWN SCENTS WAFTING BY, AND SHE WISHES SUDDENLY THAT SHE HAD THE POWER TO SHED THE GOLDEN SKIN SHE WEARS, AND HUMAN ONCE AGAIN, RUN NAKED THRU THE EXOTIC GRASSES.



BUT SHE CANNOT. AND ALL AT ONCE, UNBIDDEN, A HUNDRED MILLION YEARS OF LONGING SENDS SOBS THROUGH HER.

O, LADY, WHY DOST THOU WEEP?



TO BE CONTINUED...

COBALT-60

BASED ON CHARACTERS BY VAUGHN BODÉ

ARTWORK BY MARK BODÉ

STORY BY LARRY TODD

© MARK & BARBARA BODÉ 1984

SYNOPSIS

FE 56, king of the Radio People, is dead. So is his queen, AU 80. To all appearances, they were killed by one of the ravaging bands of mutants who live in the wastelands beyond Radio City. Since their deaths, the new rulers, Strontium 90 and his prime minister, Polonium 210, have conducted a reign of terror against the increasingly violent and antagonistic mutants. The Holy Molders, priests of human genetics, seek out and purge any who show signs of even marginal mutation. Mutants themselves are slaughtered by the military, and sterilization edicts are issued. But, in one vital matter, Strontium is prepared to risk the goodwill of his strongest supporters. BBC, heiress to the Radio throne, is approaching maturity, and despite the disapproval of the priests and his advisers, Strontium intends to wed her.

However, unknown to any of them, a far better claimant to the throne still exists. Cobalt 60, the son of FE 56 and AU 80, was sent away to safety while he was still a child, and raised by a marginal mutant. Now, grown to manhood, he keeps his features hidden by a hood of white cloth and strikes for the mutants, without warning, killing those he was born to rule.





FAVUMP!

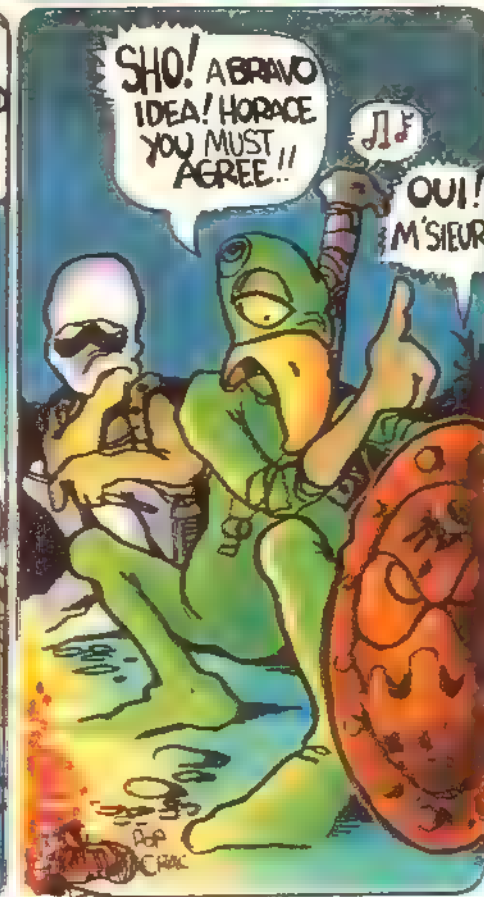
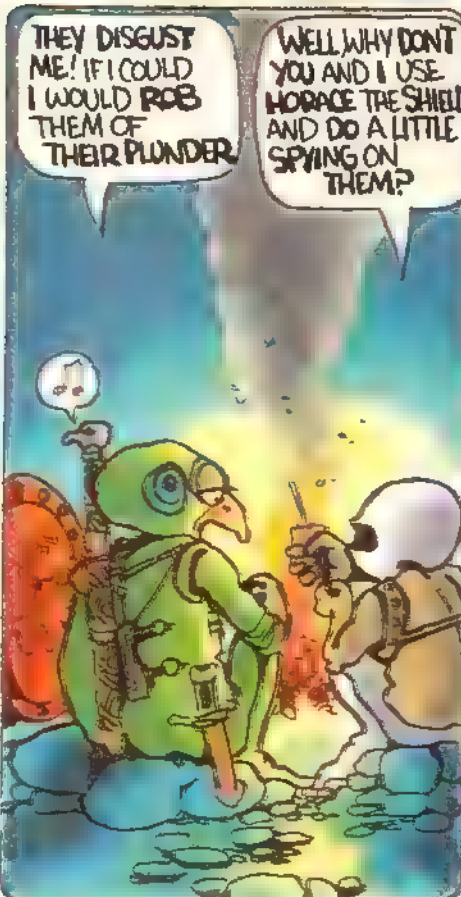
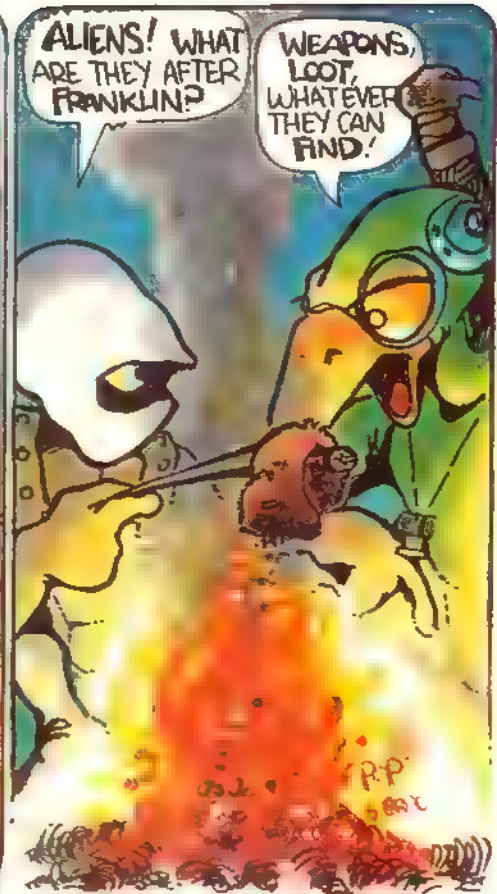
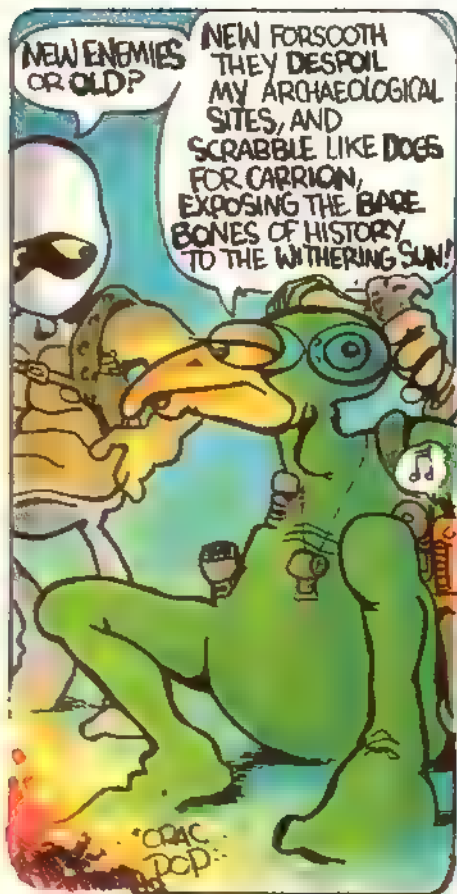


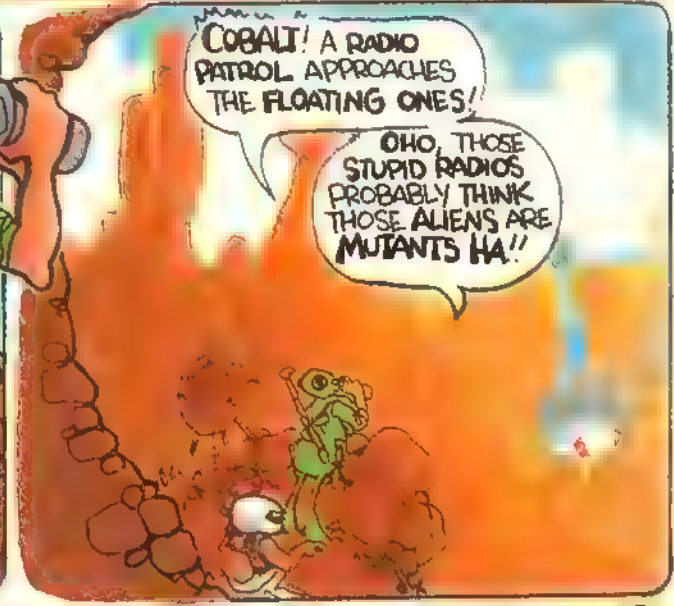
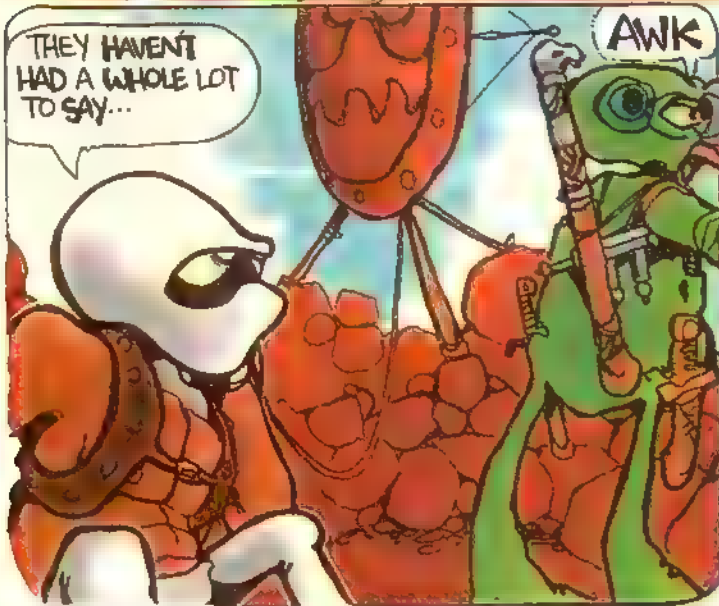
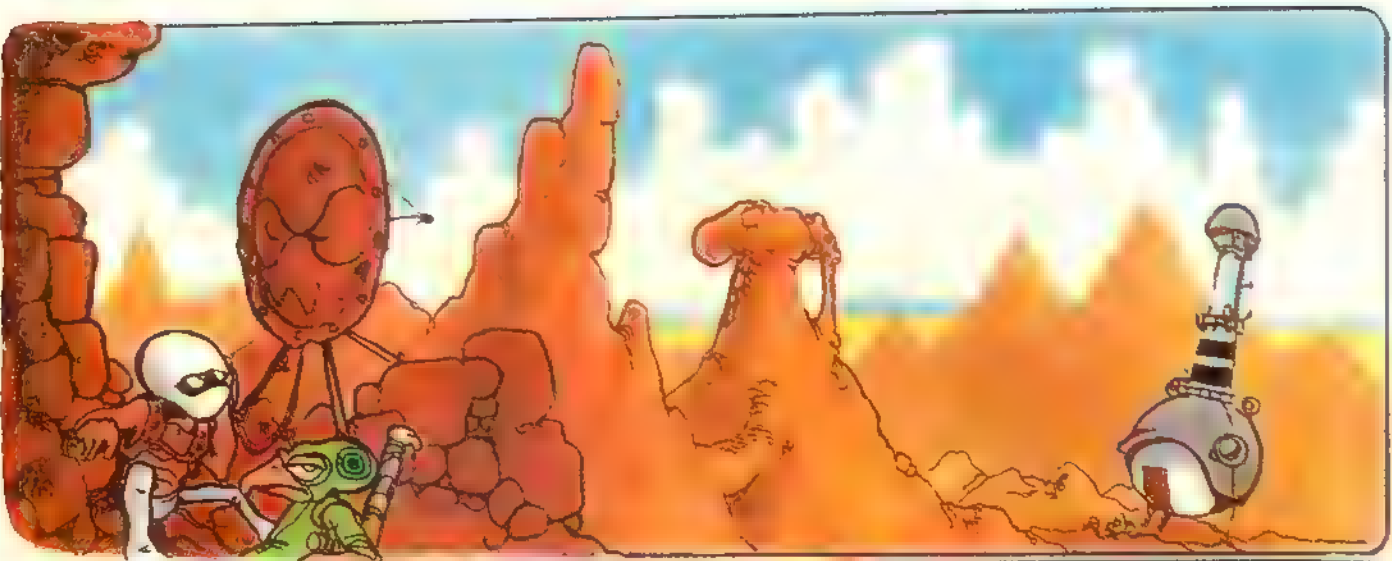
HO, GRASSER! I SEE SMOKE...



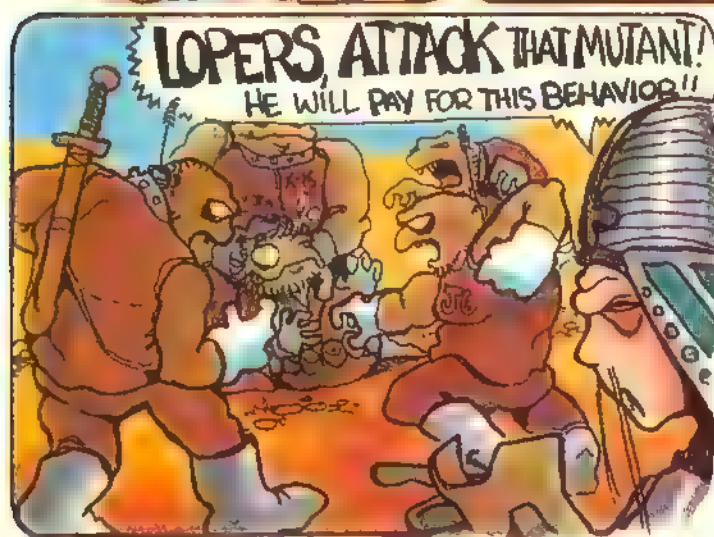
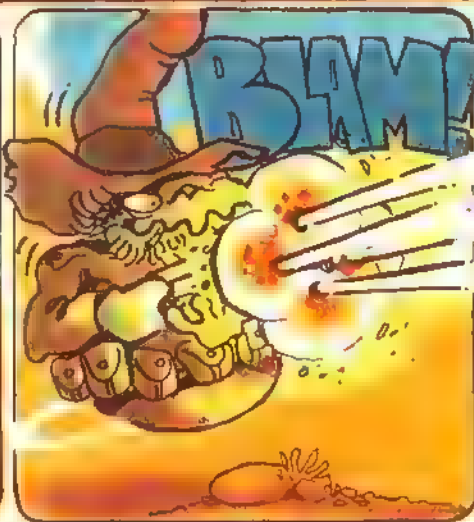
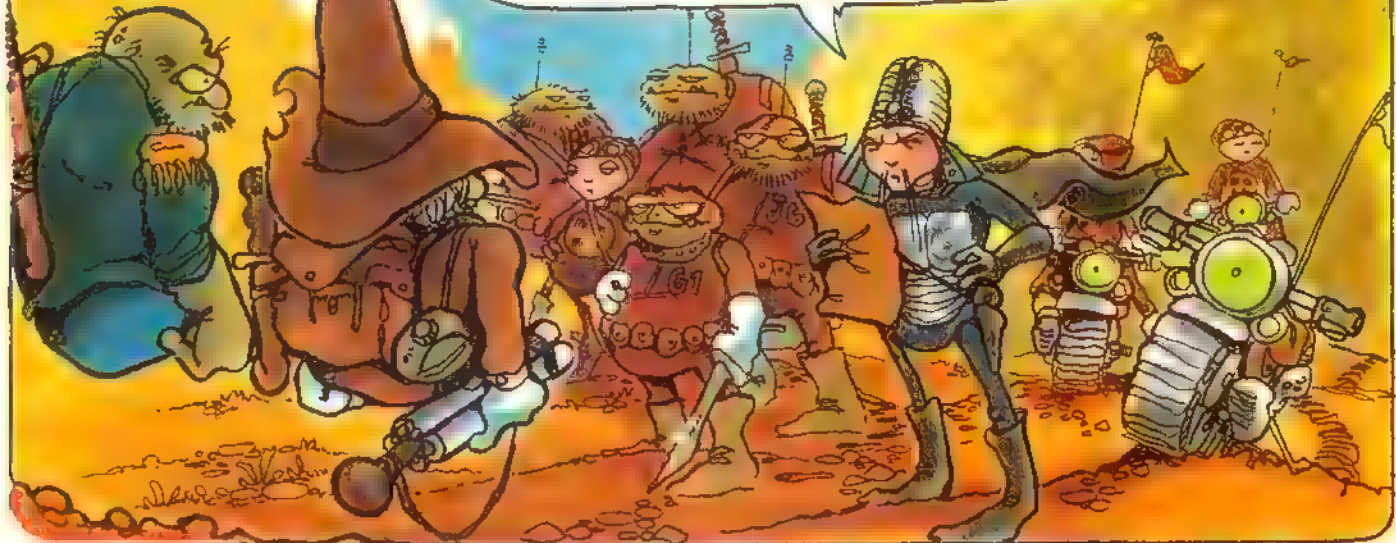
YOU STAY HERE GREAT BEAST, AND EAT THE DUST WEED...

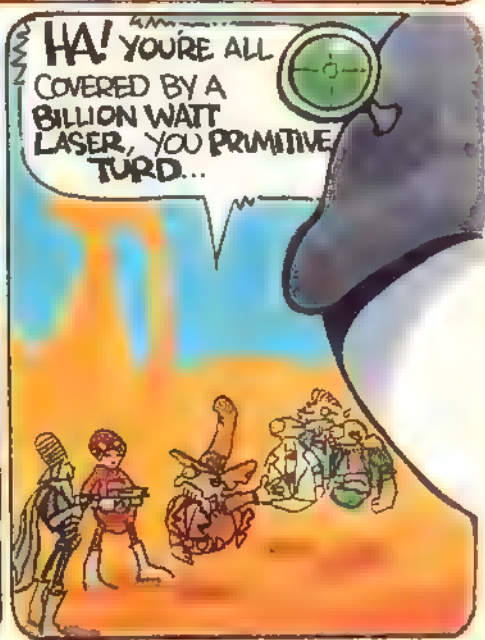






BY ORDER OF HIS GRACIOUS EMINENCE STRONTIUM 90
RULER OF THE SAND, SEA, AND CITY, BY WHOSE LEAVE
THE MOON AND SUN MAKE THEIR DAILY PASSAGES,
YE MUTANTS ARE HERE BY ORDERED TO PUT DOWN
YOUR ARMS AND SURRENDER TO THE INFINITE
MERCY OF THE GENETIC PURGE...





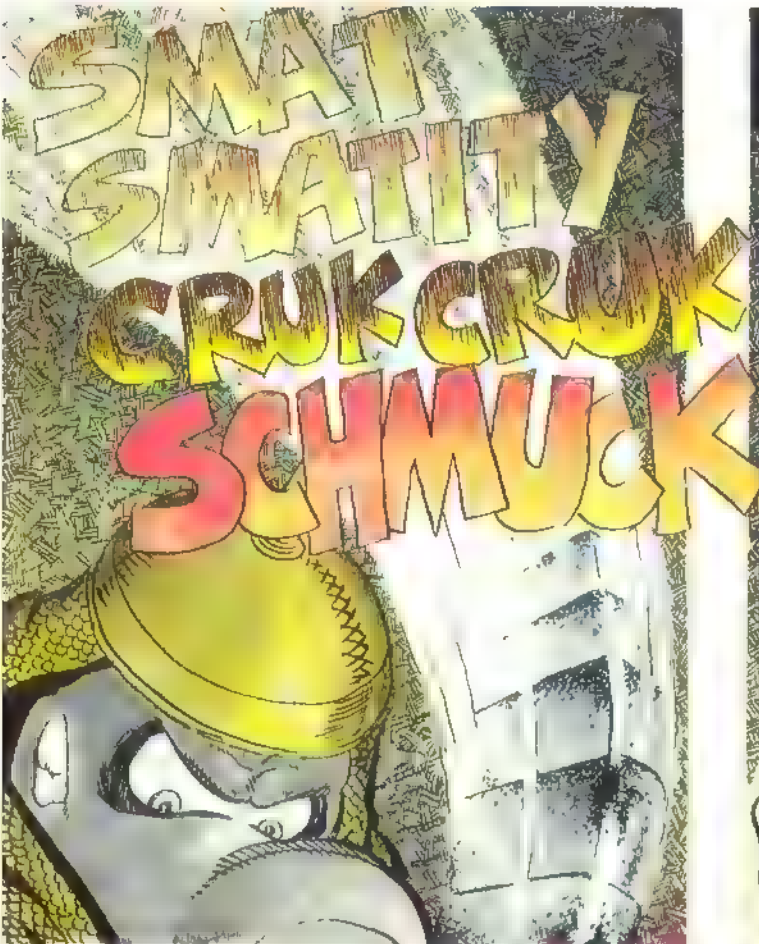
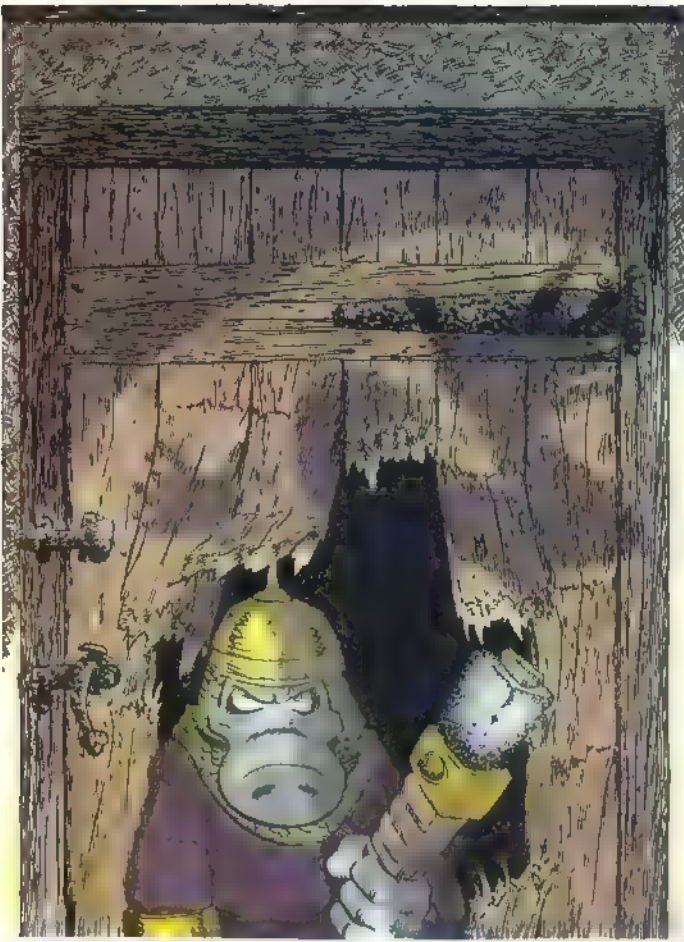
bam

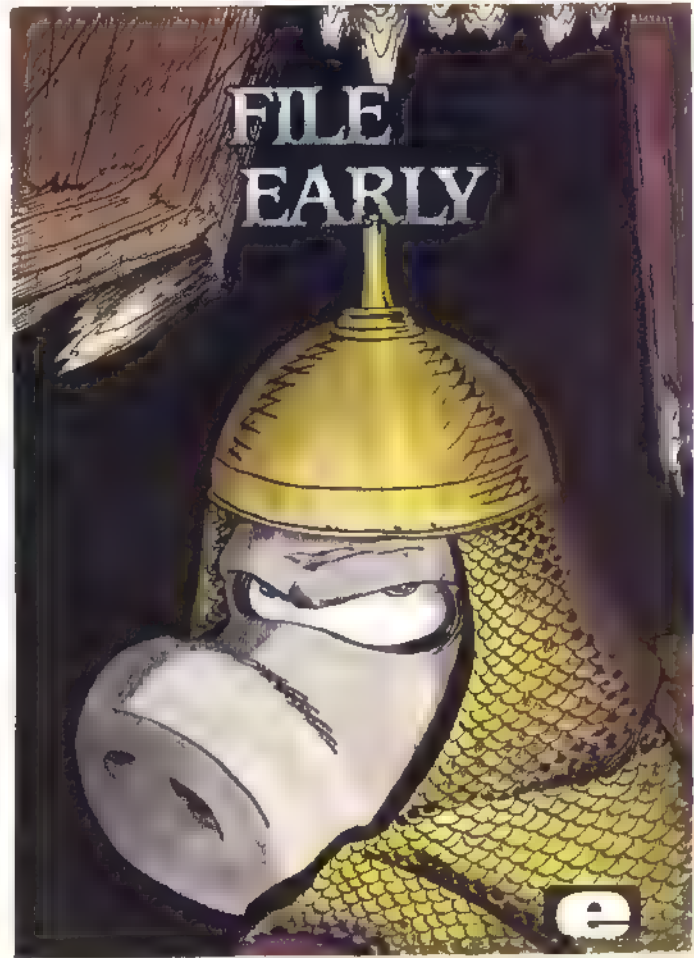
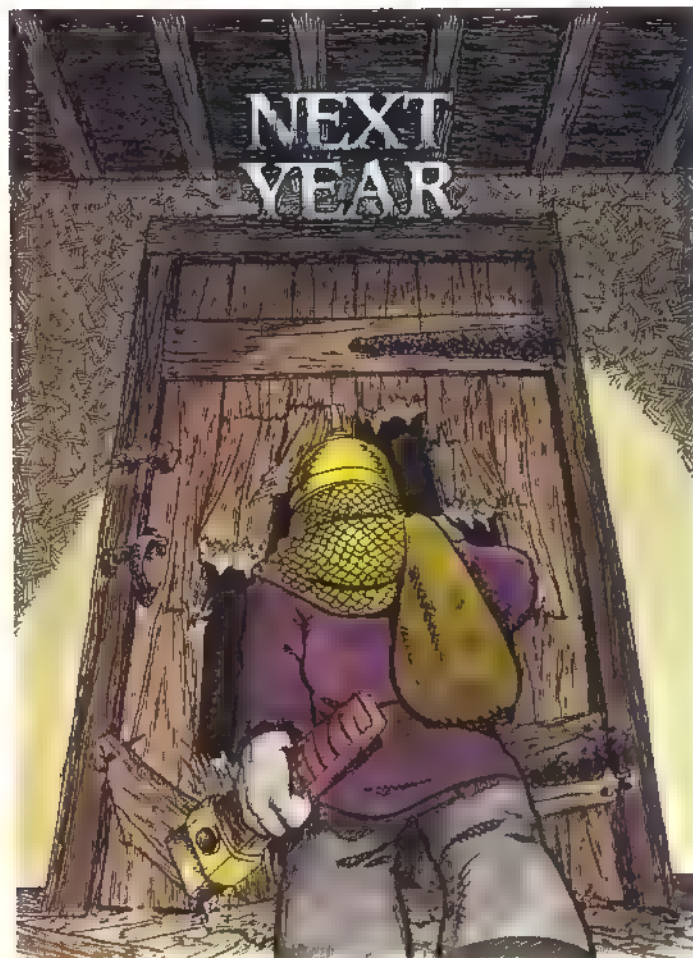
bam

bam

a friendly Reminder







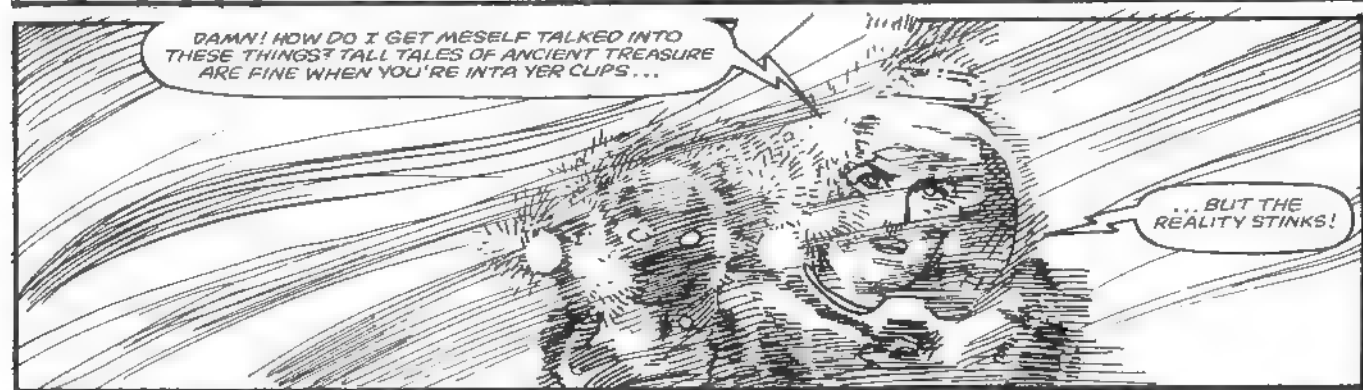
TREASURE HUNT

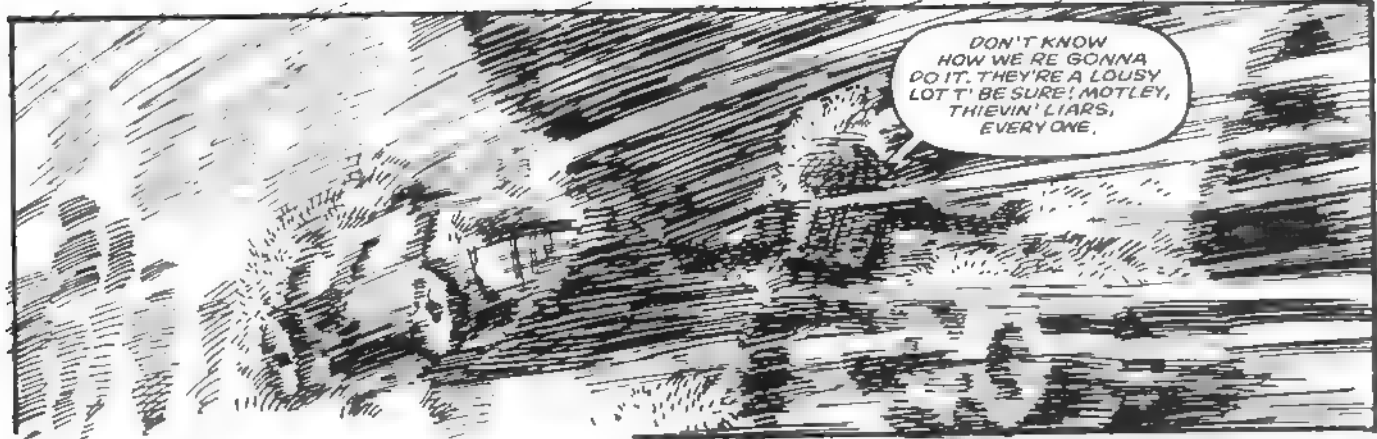


YOU'LL NOT SPEAK
OF THE CAP'N IN
THAT MANNER,
SIRRAH!



AWWW, LADY,
I DIDN'T MEAN
NUTHIN'!



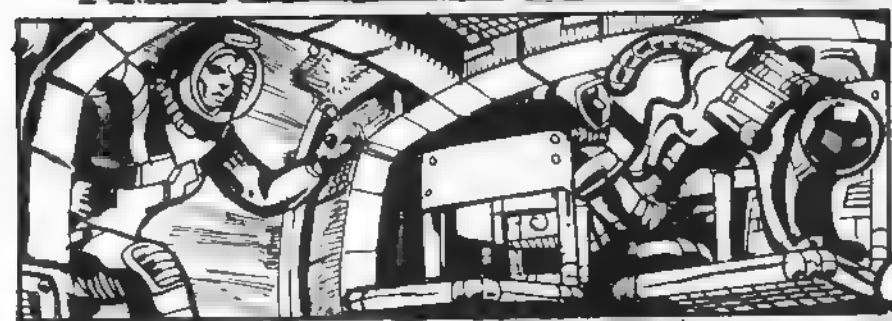


DON'T KNOW
HOW WE'RE GONNA
DO IT. THEY'RE A LOUSY
LOT! BE SURE! MOTLEY,
THIEVIN' LIARS,
EVERY ONE.



BUT... THEY'RE THE
BEST THERE IS.

YOUR
RESEARCH
PAID OFF.



THAT'S WHY
I'M THE
CAPTAIN



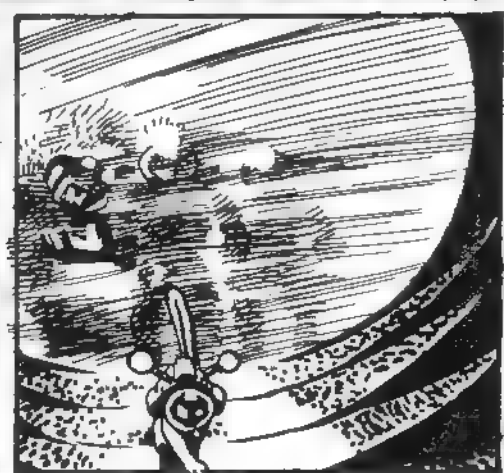
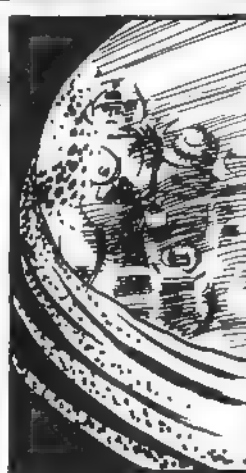
YOU BROUGHT
THE SHUTTLE DOWN
GREAT, LADY WE'RE ONLY
A HECTAMETER AWAY
FROM THE SITE.

LET'S JUST
HOPE SOME O' THIS
UNSTABLE GROUND
DON'T OPEN UP UNDER
US AS WE MAKE UP
THE DISTANCE



SITE COMIN' ON
SCREEN NOW.

COO-WEE, WE'S
ALL GONNA
BE RICH!





PURE MOTHER-LUVIN'
METADIAMOND! AND
SIRIAN RUBIES! I
CAN RETIRE!

JŌNSIE,
DON'T—

IT'S EATING
HIM, CAP'N!
WHAT'LL
WE DO?

WE'VE NO
DEFENSIVE
WEAPONS.

AAARRRRRRR.....

RUN!

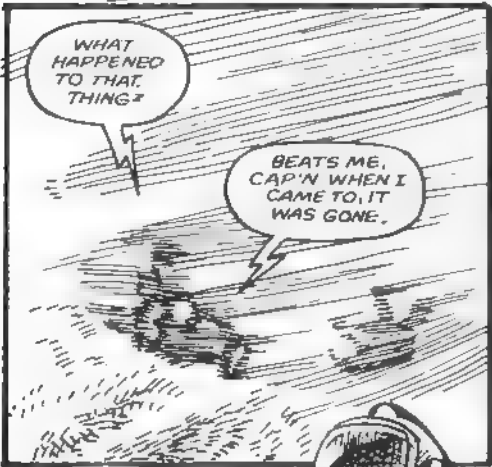




HEY!
WAIT FOR
ME!

JONSIE?
WE THOUGHT
YOU WERE DEAD!

NAW, JUST
STUNNED BUT
I GOT MY
METADIAMOND!



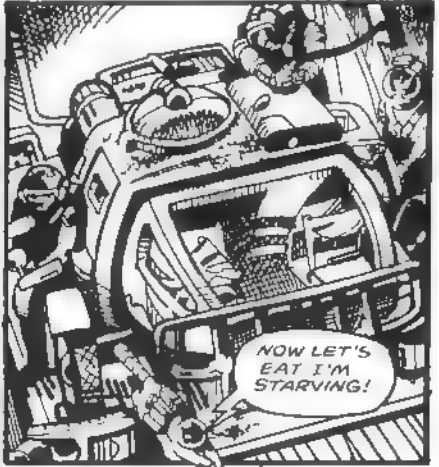
WHAT
HAPPENED
TO THAT
THING?

BEATS ME,
CAP'N WHEN I
CAME TO, IT
WAS GONE.



WHAT DO
WE DO?

LEAVE.
JONSIE'S BAUBLE
WILL PAY OFF THIS
SHIP PLUS WHAT I
OWE YOU DOGS F'R
COMIN' HERE IN
THE FIRST
PLACE.



NOW LET'S
EAT I'M
STARVING!



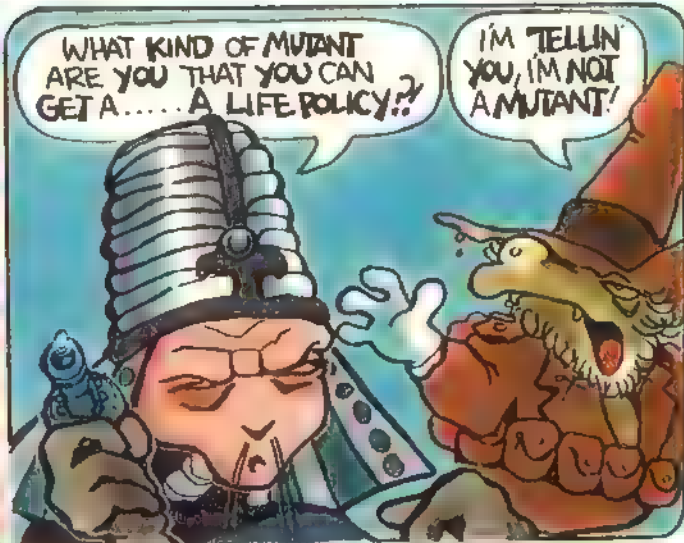
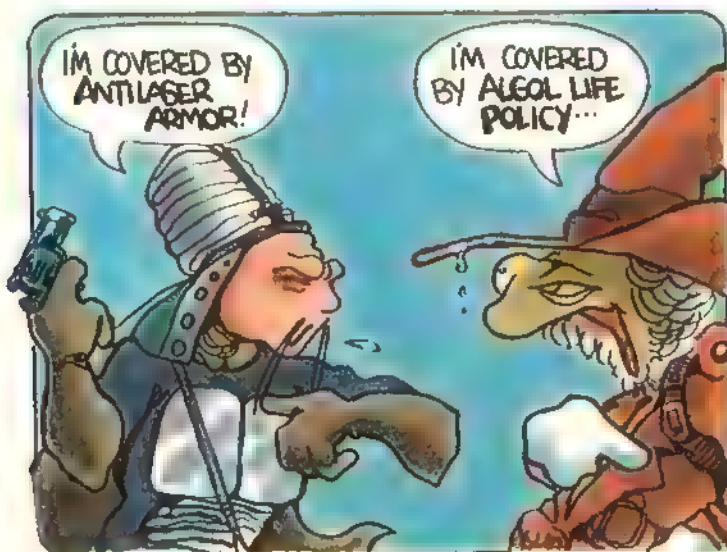
LAST ONE
TO THE GALLEY
HAS TO COOK.

C'MON, MAN.
LET GO THAT
THING AND
DE SUIT.



COME
ON,
MAN!





SCAVENGING! WHAT THE HELL DO YOU THINK A SCAVENGER DOES? WE'RE DIGGING FOR OLD ELECTRICAL WIRING LOTS A GOOD COPPER THERE. WE FOUND A BUNCH OF OTHER STUFF TOO, BUT ITS NOTHIN YOU'D BE INTO... HEH

HMMM, CORDON BLEU 1952 8ZZZZZZT!

8ZZZZT!

HOKAY BIGEYE, I, BESIDES BEING THE PRIMEMINISTER TO THE RADIO PEOPLE AM AN OFFICIAL OF THE BOARD OF MINING AND I FIND YOU IN VIOLATION OF-

'GULP' DON'T FORGET THE GIGAWATT LASER...

IN VIEW OF WHICH I AM INCLINED TO BE LENIENT...

VERY WISE FOR AN EARTHLING...

IT HAS HOWEVER OCCURED TO ME THAT YOU MIGHT BE OF SERVICE TO MY PEOPLE IF YOU CAN GO DIGGING SO EASILY AFTER SUCH THINGS AS OLD WIRING...

GO ON...

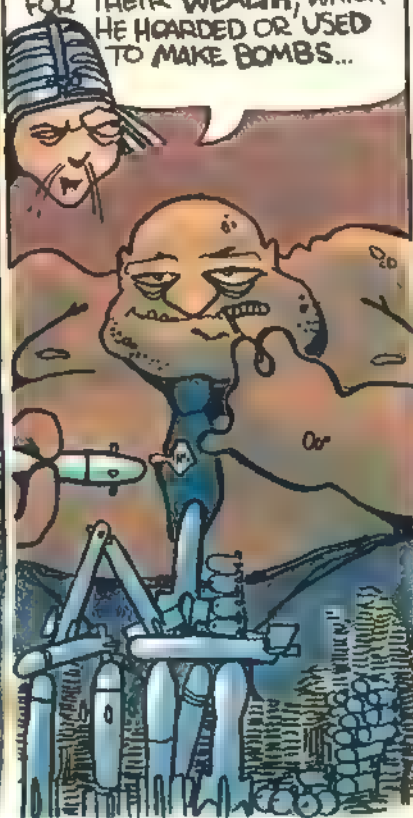
AS WELL, AT THE SITE I HAVE IN MIND, THERE MAY BE TREASURE ENOUGH FOR ALL OF US...

DO TELL RADIO MAN, DO TELL!

THERE WAS, BEFORE THE GREAT WAR
A FIERCE OGRE, WHO LIVED TO
THE SOUTH OF FREESNOW, WHO
ROBBED EVERYONE AND
COMMANDED A GREAT ARMY
OF GOONS...



THIS OGRE WAS NAMED
"IRS", AND HIS AGENTS
HOUNDED PEOPLE TO DEATH
FOR THEIR WEALTH, WHICH
HE HOARDED OR USED
TO MAKE BOMBS...

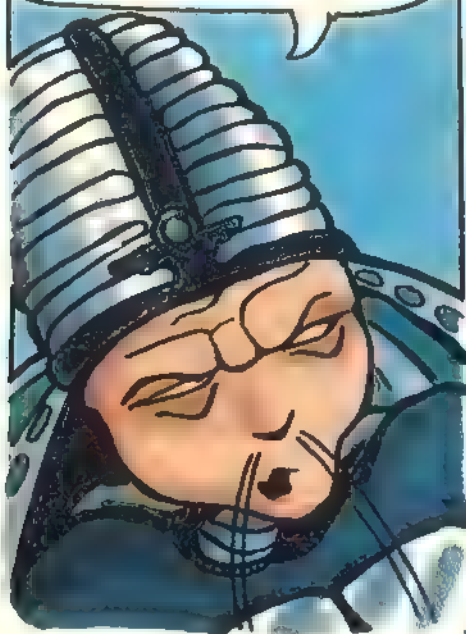


WE KNOW THE SITE OF THE
HOARD OF IRS', BUT WE
CANNOT DIG IT OUT, SO
DEEPLY UNDER BLASTGLASS
IT LIES...

BLASTGLASS, THATS NOTHI-
I MEAN, AHH... THEY REALLY
HATED HIM, EH?



PRESUMABLY, THOUGH THERE
ARE SO MANY OTHER SUCH BLAST-
GLASS CRATERS, THAT ONE
CAN ONLY ASSUME THAT HATRED
WAS THE ONLY WAY OF LIFE
IN THE OLD WORLD...



SUCH IS OFTEN TRUE
WITH THESE POST BELLUM
WORLDS... AND I'VE
SEEN ALOT OF 'EM
LET ME TELL YOU!



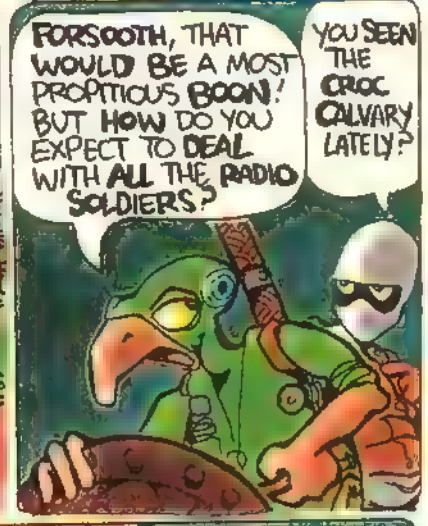
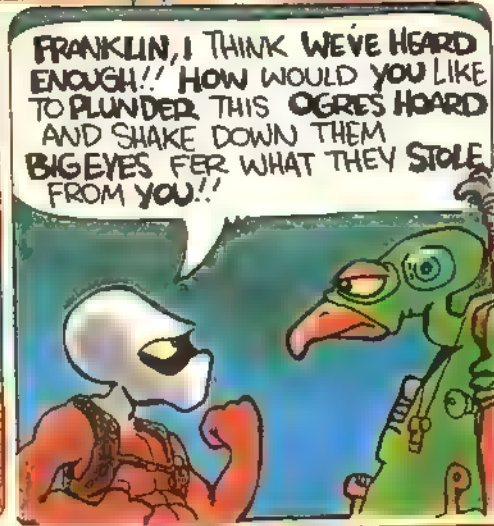
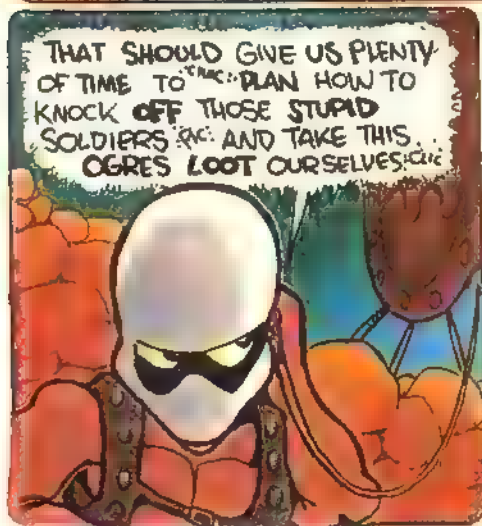
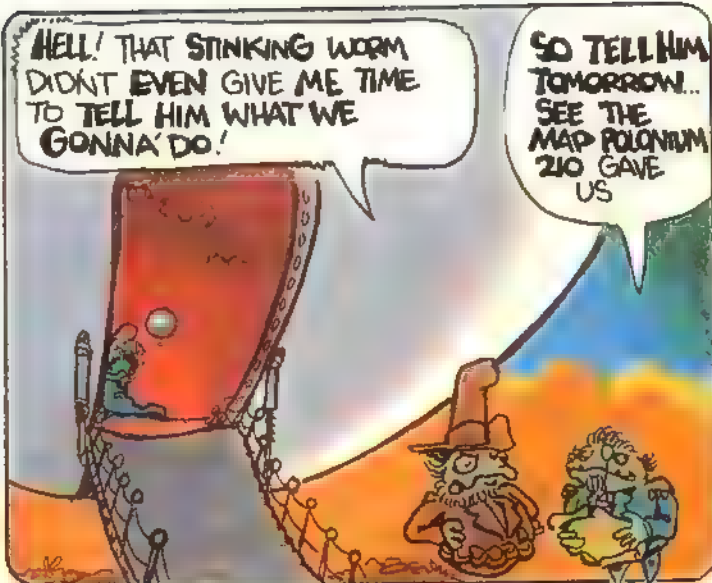
SO IN RETURN FOR FREE
PASSAGE AND DIGGING RIGHTS,
WE WANT YOU TO OPEN THE
HOARD OF THE OGRE IRS'

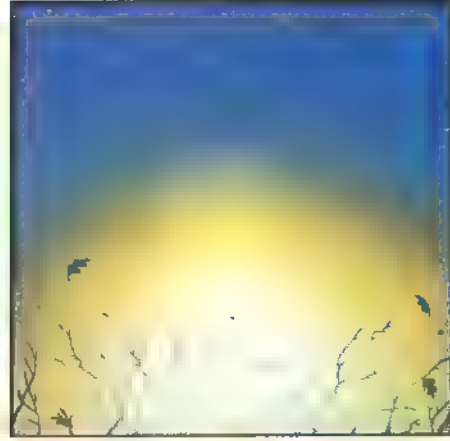
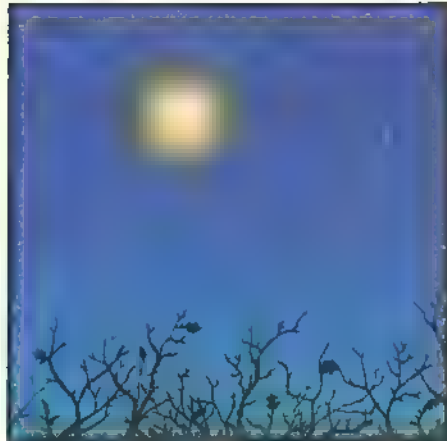
STRONTIUM'S
GONNA LOVE
THIS!

I THINK YOU GOT
YOURSELF A DEAL!

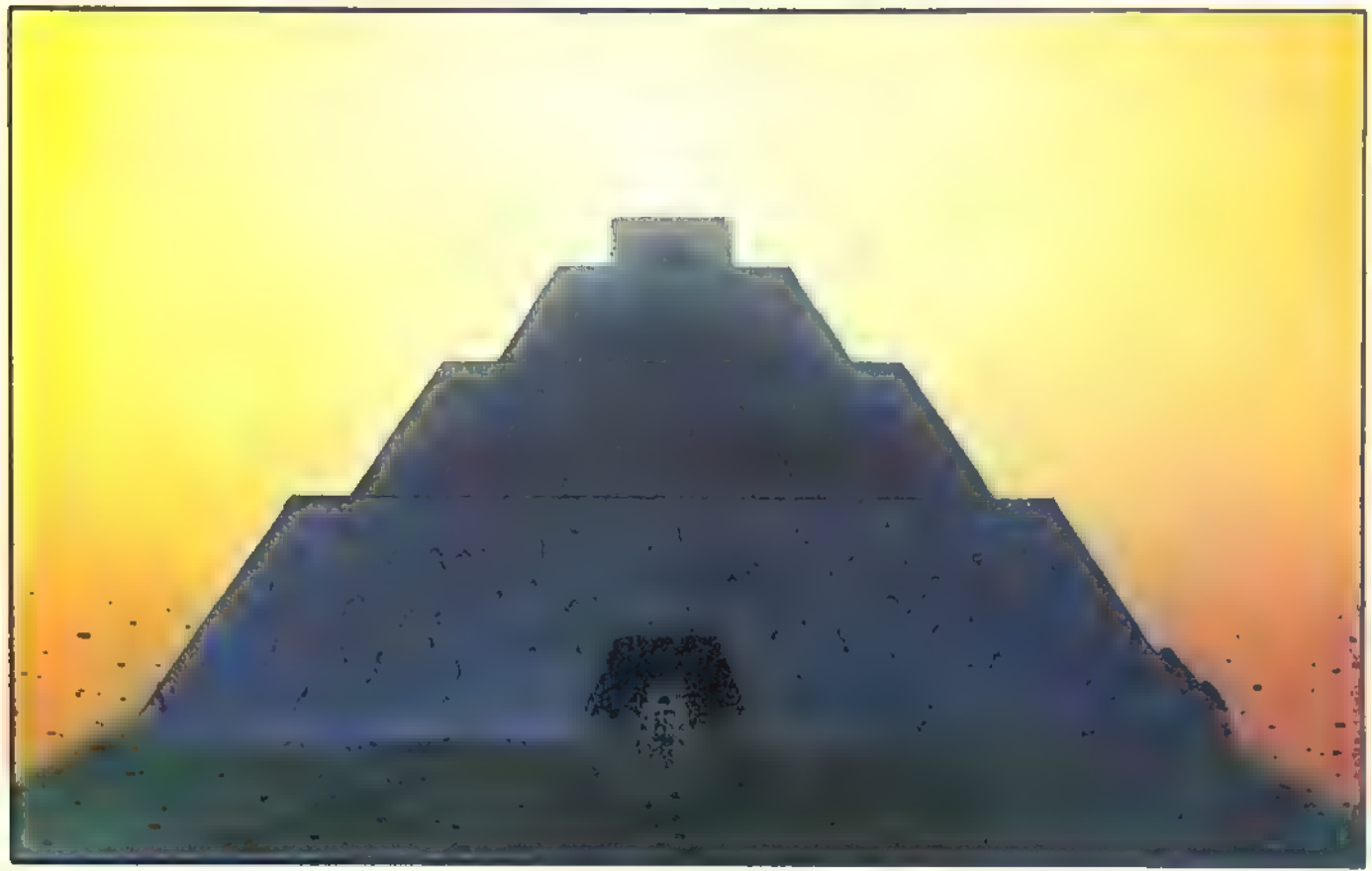
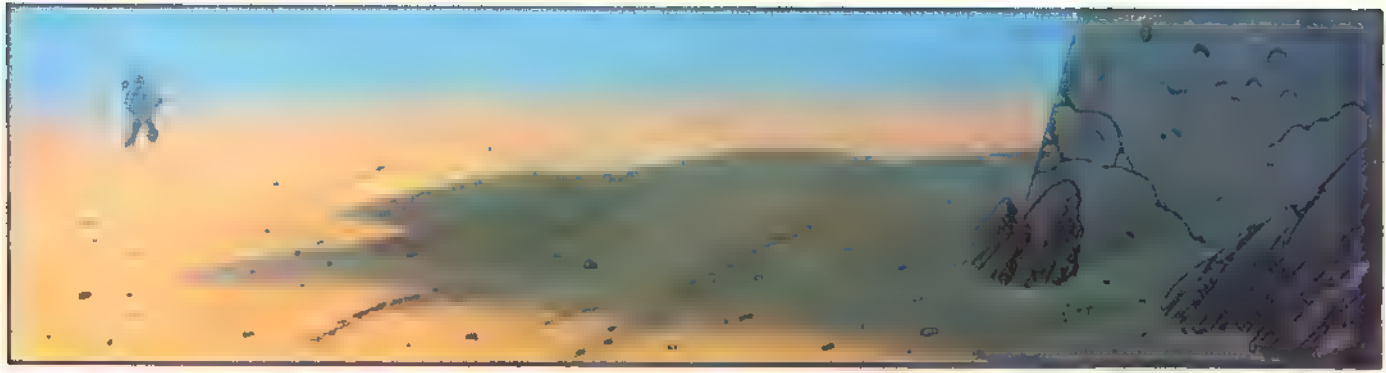




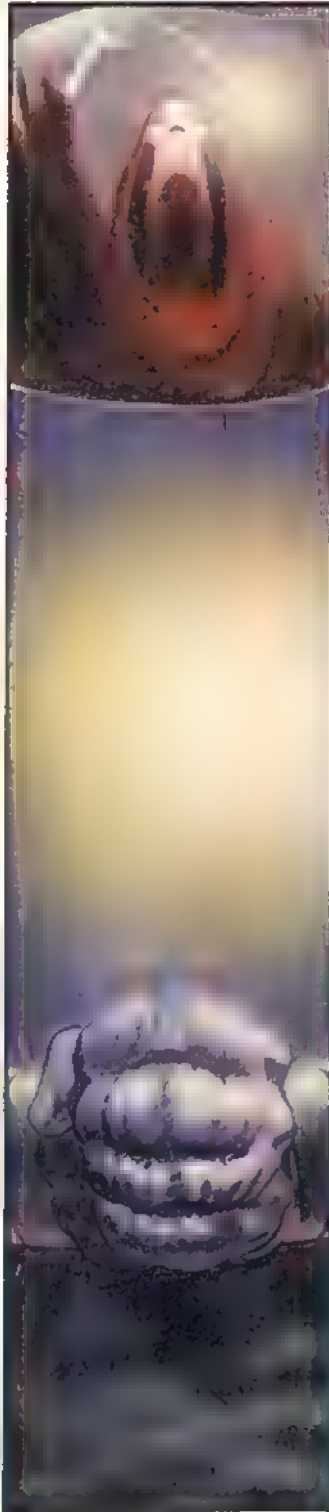
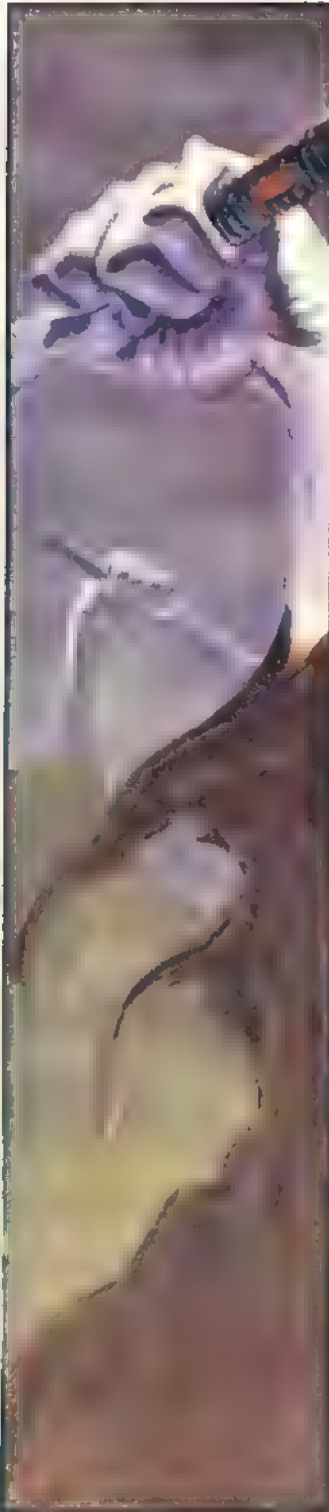


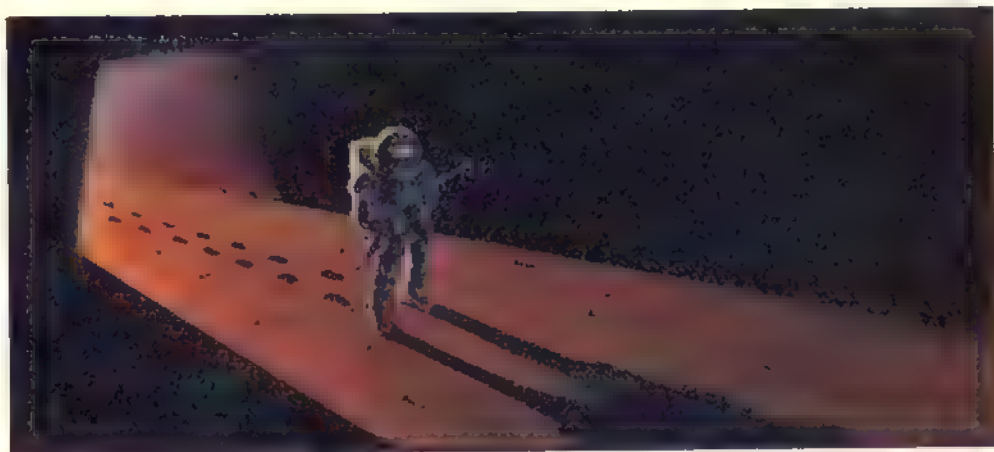


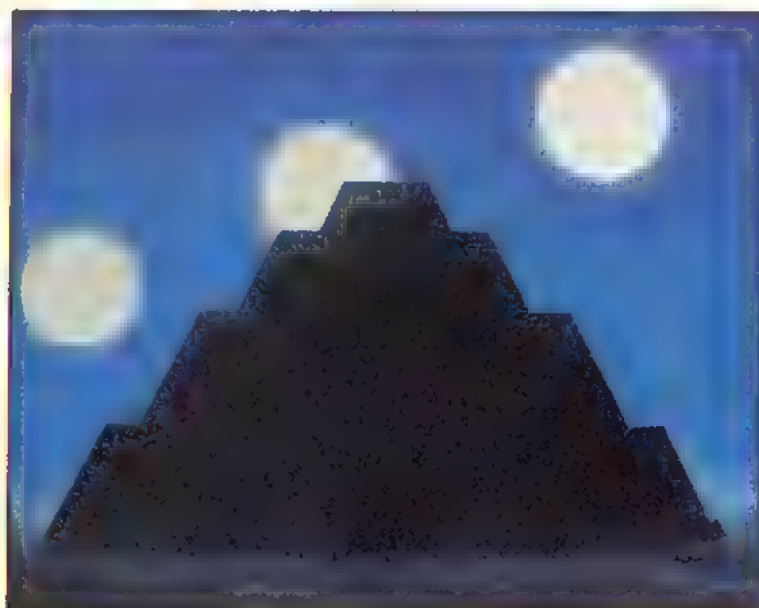
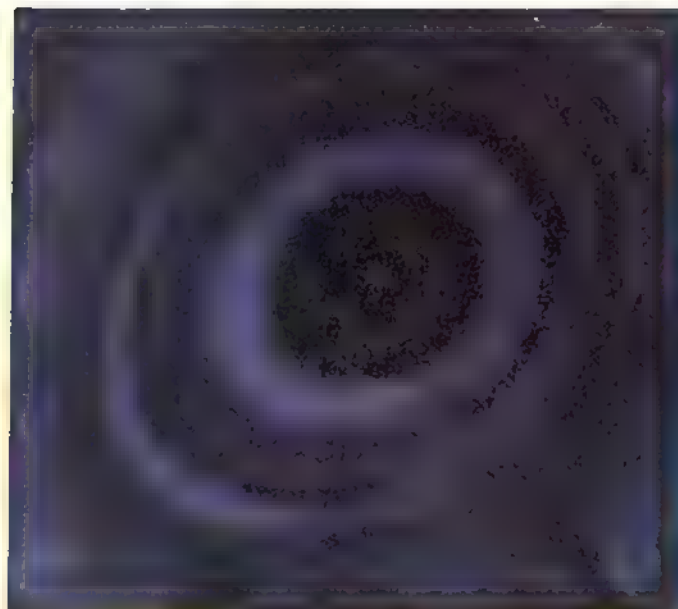


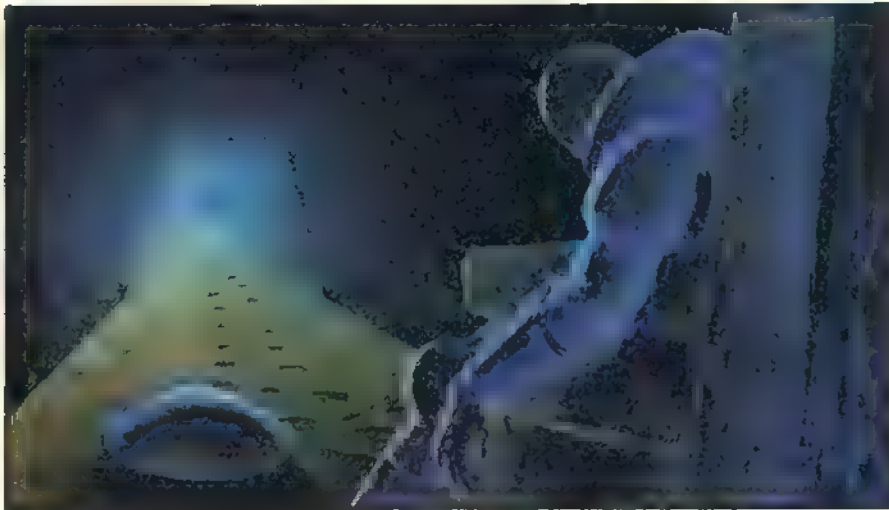
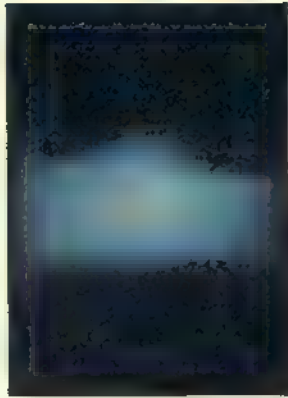
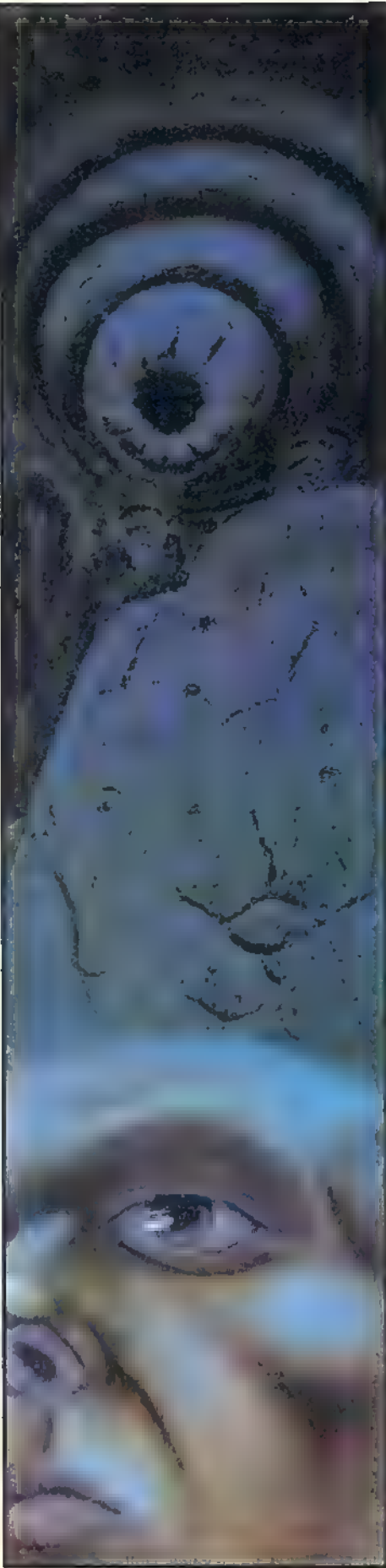


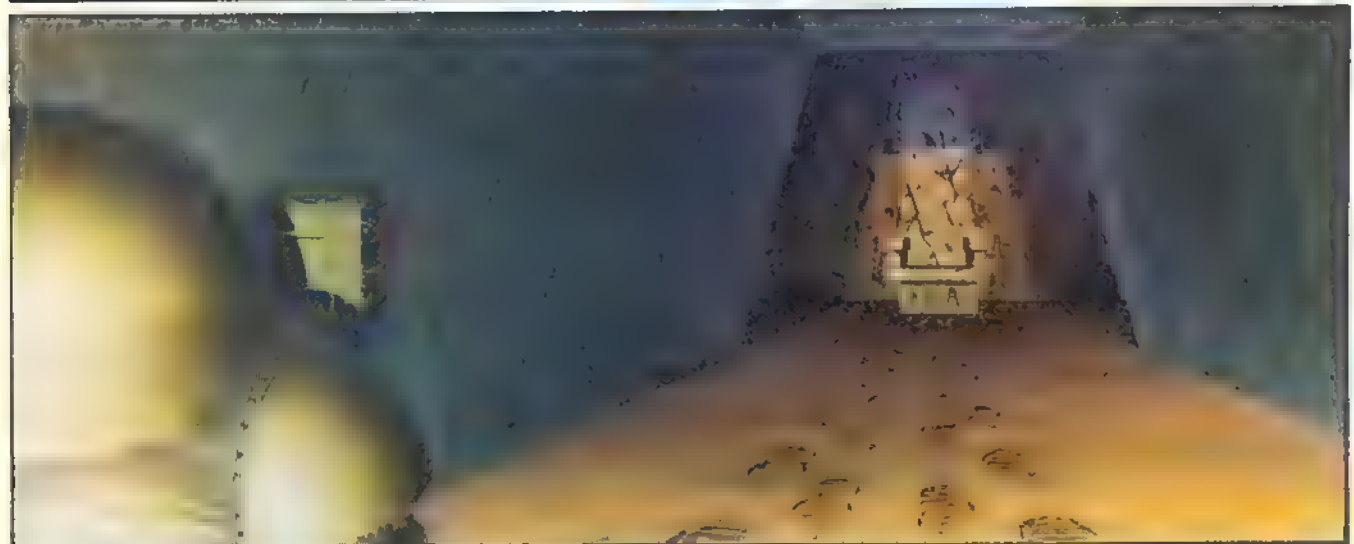
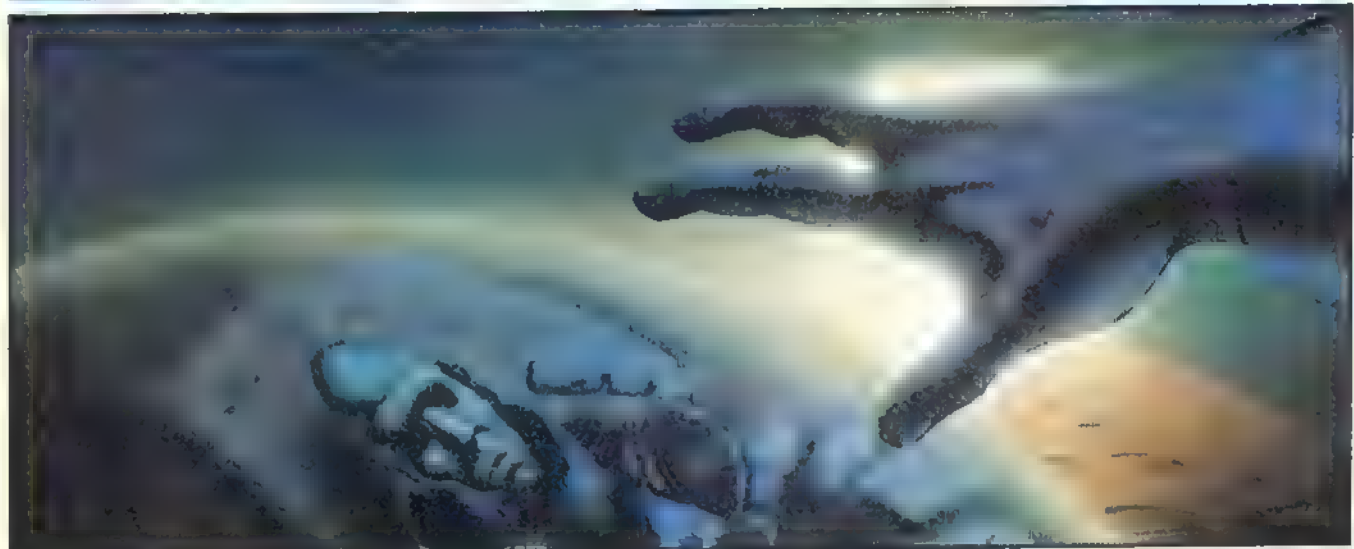
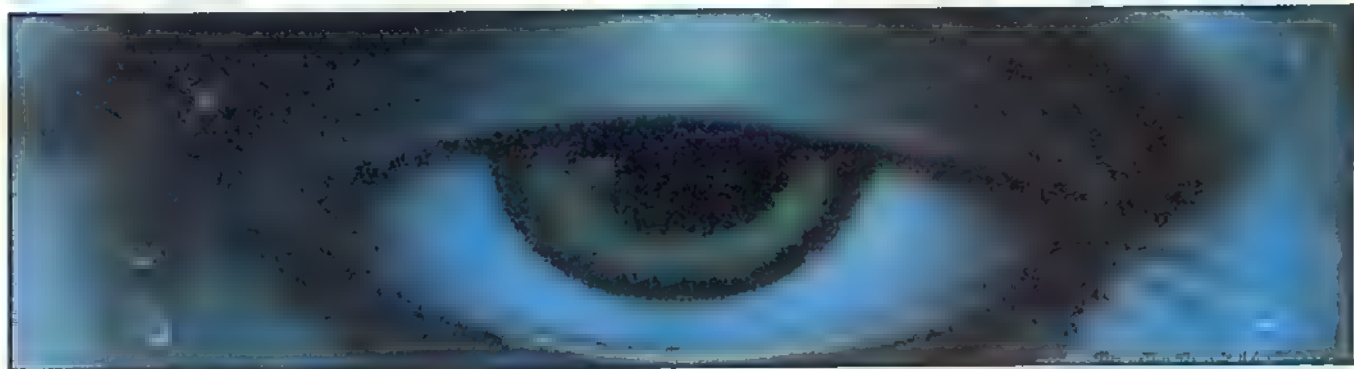
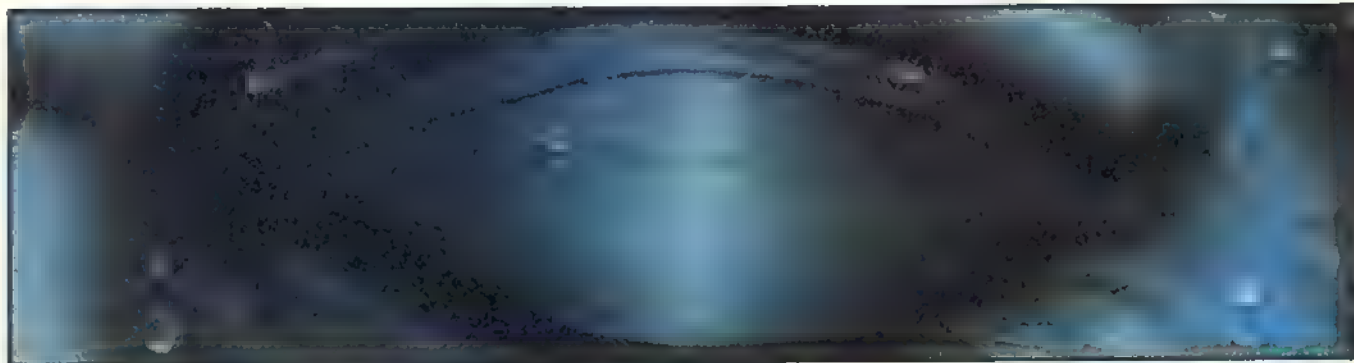


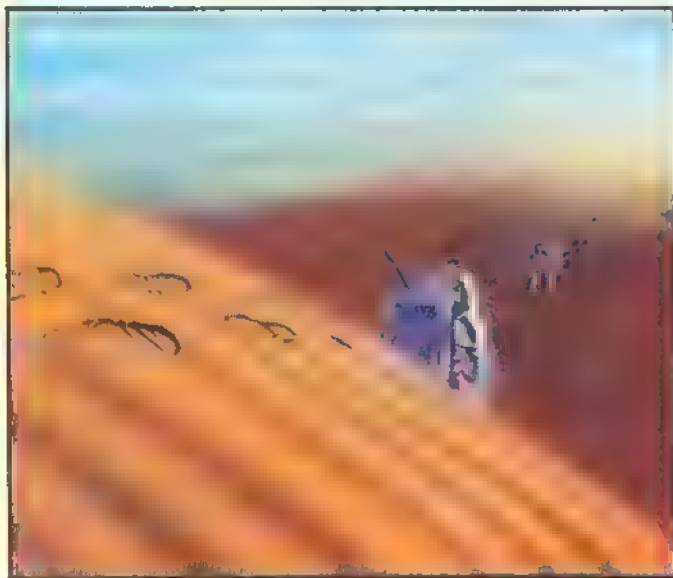
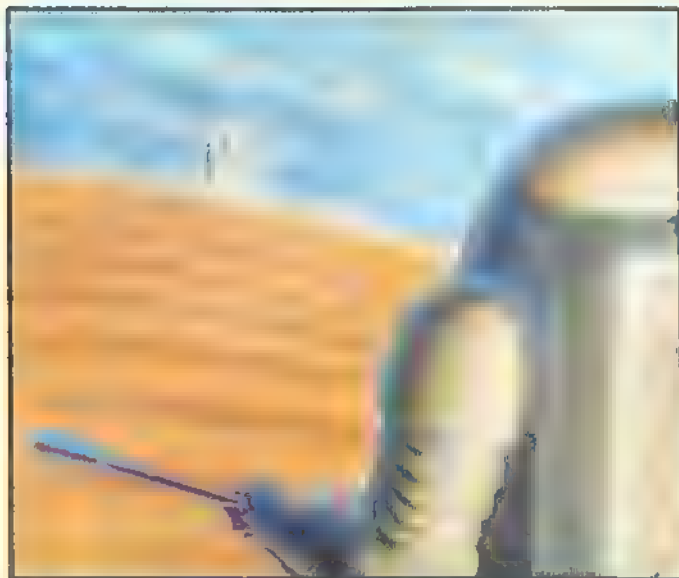
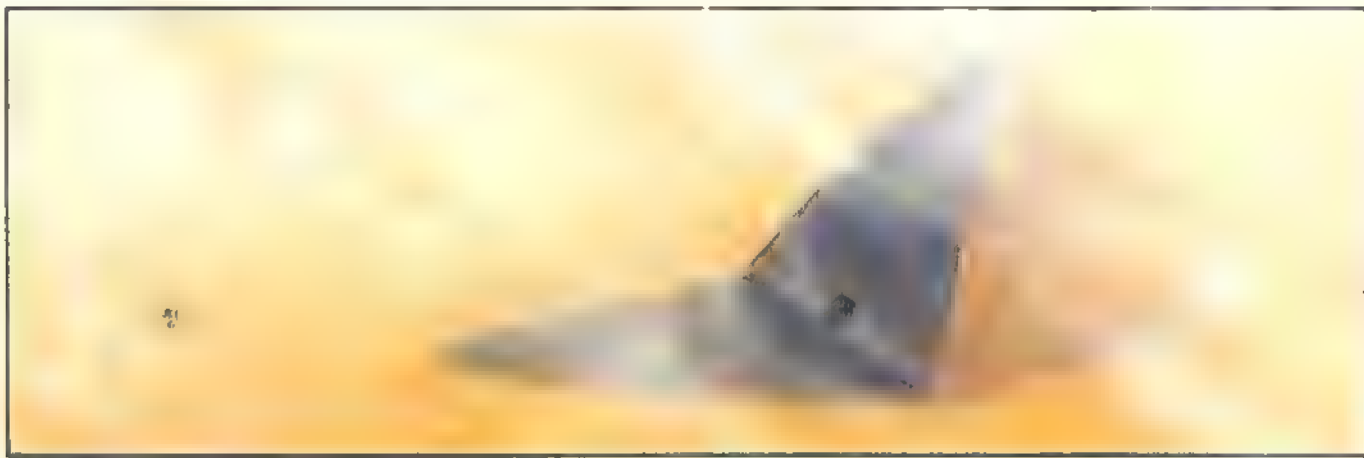






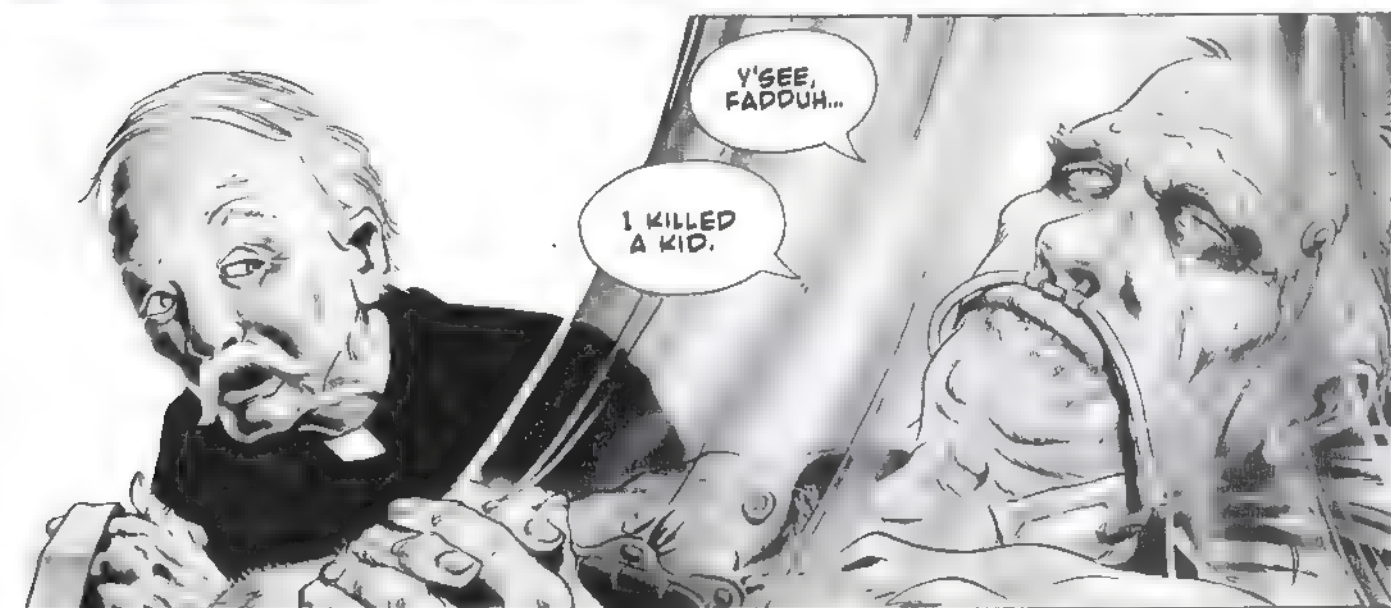
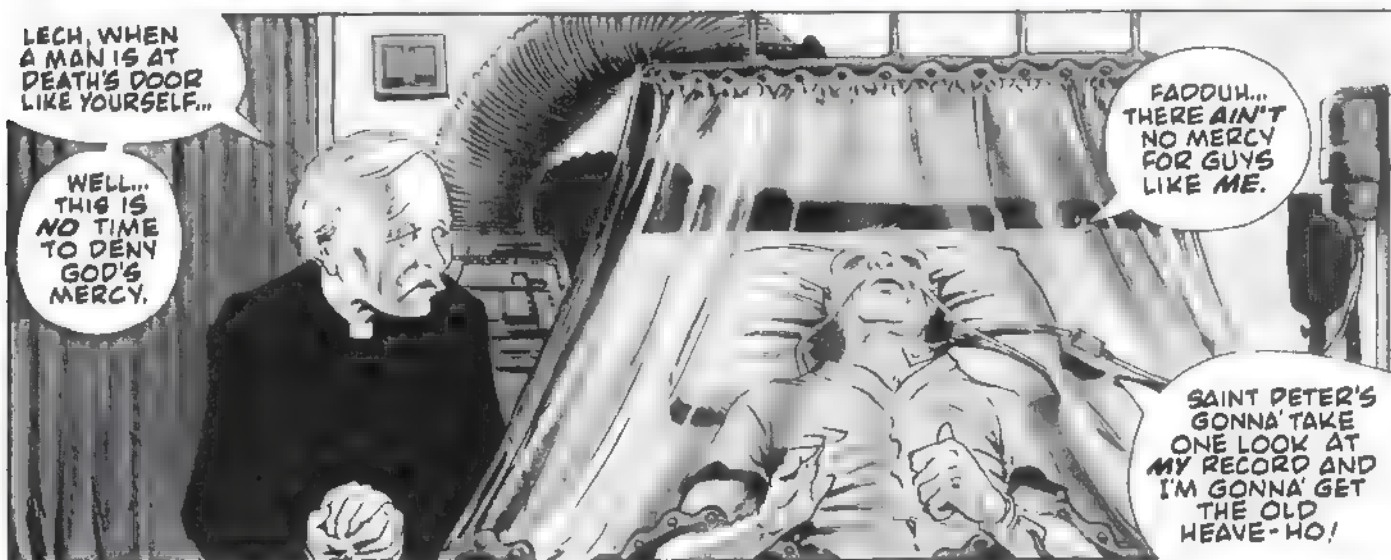






THE EVERLASTING TAG

© 84
Rick
Veitch



DO YOU WISH
TO MAKE A
CONFESSION?

I'M NOT SURE
I REMEMBER
THE WORDS.
I'LL TRY...

'BLESS
ME, FADDUH,
FOR I HAVE
SINNED. IT
HAS BEEN...

OVER THE YEARS I'VE KINDA LET
MY FAITH LAPSE. IF YA KNOW WHAT
I MEAN. BUT WHEN I WAS A KID, I
WENT FOR IT IN A BIG WAY...

...IT HAS
BEEN A LONG
TIME SINCE
MY LAST
CONFESSION...

I USED TO MAKE
ALL THE NOVENAS
AND I NEVER
MISSED SUNDAYS!

I GUESS I BEGAN TO LET IT GO WHEN I STARTED AT THE TRAINYARDS. IT WAS VERY
DEMANDING WORK--WE WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SECURITY OF OVER HALF
THE ROLLING STOCK IN THE CITY! I TOOK IT SERIOUS! MAYBE TOO SERIOUS...

MY BEAT WAS
THE SUBWAY
PENS, AND I
DON'T MIND
TELLIN' YOU I
HAD MY HANDS
FULL WITH
THOSE GOOD-
FER-NUTHIN'
GRAFFITI
WRITERS...

YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND, THESE GUYS'LL DO
ANYTHING TO MAKE WHAT THEY CALL THEIR
EVERLASTING TAG--SOMETHING THAT WILL BE
SEEN BY EVERYONE, ALL OVER THE CITY...

NOW I KNOW THOSE BIG ART FAGGOTS
DOWNTOWN LIKE TO SAY HOW WHAT THESE
KIDS DO IS HIGH ART AND ALL THAT RARE
HORSESHIT.

PARDON MY LATIN, FADDUH!

SO I GAVE
MY JOB THE
DEDICATION
IT REQUIRED.
AND YOU KNOW
SOMETHING?

IT BEGAN TO
PAY OFF!

THE VANDALS KNEW I WAS SERIOUS AND THEY DIDN'T
COME AROUND ON MY BEAT SO MUCH...

BUT EVEN A DOPE
LIKE ME CAN SEE
THAT IT MAKES
FOLKS THINK THE
SYSTEM IS FALLIN'
APART...

IT SCARES
EM, FADDUH.

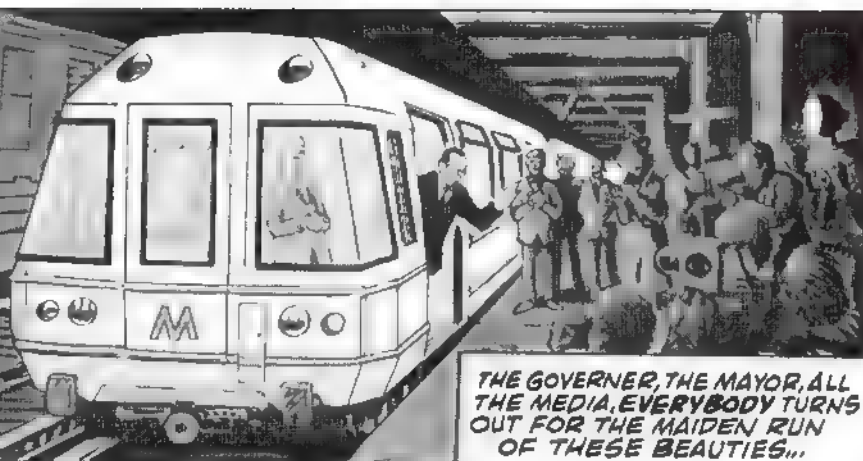
SURE, THERE WERE STILL
THE OCCASIONAL JOKERS
WHO GOT THROUGH AND
TRIED TO SCORE THEIR
EVERLASTING TAGS...

BUT I'D BE WAITIN' FOR 'EM, AND JUDGE BOBROWSKI
HAD A CELL READY FOR EACH ONE I BROUGHT HIM...

SO, WITH MY EFFORTS, AND THOSE OF
A LOT OF HARDWORKING GUYS LIKE
ME, IT LOOKS LIKE AFTER A FEW
YEARS WE GOT THE PROBLEM
JUST ABOUT LICKED...

I'LL BE DAMNED IF THE
ADMINISTRATION DON'T
GO OUT AND SPEND A
HALF A BILLION ON SOME
BRAND NEW TRAINS!

OH, THEY WERE SOMETHIN'!
REAL MODERN AND CLEAN,
JUST LIKE SAN FRANCISCO!



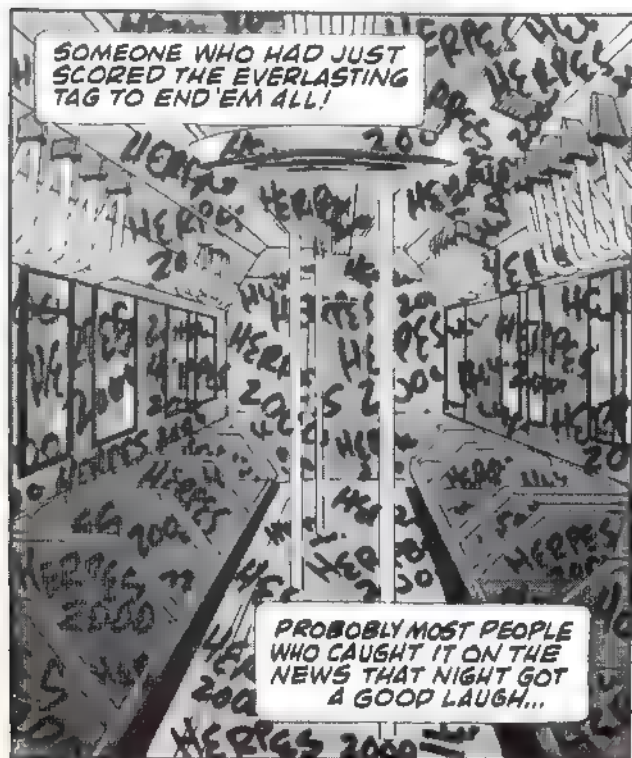
THE GOVERNER, THE MAYOR, ALL
THE MEDIA, EVERYBODY TURNS
OUT FOR THE MAIDEN RUN
OF THESE BEAUTIES...

TROUBLE WAS... SOMEONE
ELSE HAD TURNED OUT
JUST BEFORE 'EM...



SOMEONE WHO ANNOUNCED
HIS PRESENCE IN FOUR FOOT
HIGH DAY-GLO LETTERING!

SOMEONE WHO HAD JUST
SCORED THE EVERLASTING
TAG TO END 'EM ALL!



PROBABLY MOST PEOPLE
WHO CAUGHT IT ON THE
NEWS THAT NIGHT GOT
A GOOD LAUGH...

THE ADMINISTRATION
DIDN'T SEE MUCH
HUMOR IN IT...



MY BOSS DIDN'T GO
FOR IT EITHER...



NEITHER
DID WE...



OF COURSE
NOBODY
COMPLAINED
ABOUT THE
MONEY
THEY SENT
US TO BEEF
UP SECURITY...

RESTRICTED AREA

WE WERE ABLE TO MAKE SOME REAL
IMPROVEMENTS -- THINGS WE'D
BEEN ASKING FOR ALL ALONG --
TO INSURE IT COULD NEVER
HAPPEN AGAIN...

OUR FRIEND
WITH THE
SPRAY CAN
WAS QUICK
TO POINT
OUT THE
DEFICIENCIES
IN OUR
SYSTEM...

THE ADMINISTRATION BEGAN TO WONDER IF ITS VANDALS AT ALL! THEY DECIDE MAYBE ITS POLITICAL
DIRTY TRICKSTERS OUT TO MAKE THE WHOLE TRAIN DEAL LOOK LIKE A FIASCO...

WE GET A
NEW BATCH
OF MONEY...

WITH IT COMES A SECURITY ANALYST FROM
ALBANY WITH HIS SOPHISTICATED DEVICES...

BUT WHILE WE'RE SCANNIN' THE YARDS
WITH OUR INFRA-RED, ULTRA-SOUND,
MICRO-WAVE, X-RAY DETECTORS...

OUR ENEMY WAS
FLANKING US...

AND SCORING A
DIRECT HIT
IN THE WAR
OF NERVES...

IN OUR
IMAGINATIONS
OUR OPPONENT
HAD BECOME
TWELVE FEET
TALL WITH
HIDEOUS
FANGS AND
ABLE TO WALK
THROUGH WALLS.
AT LEAST IT
SEEMED THAT
WAY OUT ON
MY BEAT...

HUH?
WHUZZAT?

THAT'S WHERE
I WAS WHEN
I HEARD THE
SOFT SPRAYING
OF THE
PAINT CAN!

THEY SENT TO ALBANY
FOR ANOTHER
SECURITY ANALYST
BUT IT WAS TOO LATE...

MY HEART JAMMED
IN MY THROAT
WHEN I FOUND...

THE
TAG!

I MUSTA' SCARED
HIM OFF BEFORE HE
COULD FINISH IT!

FOOTSTEPS BROKE
THE SILENCE...

I FOLLOWED HIM TO WHERE NO GUARD IN HIS RIGHT MIND WOULD EVER GO...

SO THIS IS HOW HE'S BEEN GETTIN' IN! WE NEVER THOUGHT ANYBODY'D BE CRAZY ENOUGH TO TRY AND MAKE IT THROUGH OLD NUMBER SEVEN...

THIS TUNNEL'S SO NARROW THERE'S NO ROOM TO DODGE THE TRAINS-- AND TRAFFIC IS CONSTANT! IT'S SHEER SUICIDE IN THERE!



...DAMNED IF I WASN'T GOIN' IN AFTER HIM...

BUT I NEVER MADE IT...

AARGH!



THERE WAS ONLY ONE OTHER HUMAN BEING CLOSE ENOUGH TO HEAR MY BLUBBERIN, AND HE WAS JUST A KID...

C'MON, MAN-- GRAB HOLD!



I GOT A GOOD GRIP! I CAN PULL YOU OUT!

I WISH NOW I HAD JUST LET GO... MAYBE THEN SAINT PETE MIGHT HAVE LET ME THROUGH THE GATES...

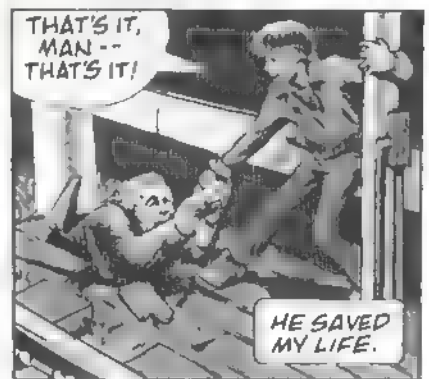
BUT NO--I WASN'T READY TO GIVE IT UP.. I BAWLED LIKE A BABY...

HELP ME! HELP ME! HELP ME!



A TWELVE YEAR OLD KID WHO HAD BEEN RUNNIN' THE WHOLE CITY RAGGED...

THAT'S IT, MAN-- THAT'S IT!



HE SAVED MY LIFE.

AND THEN FADDUH...?

...THEN I DID SOMETHING THAT I'M GOING TO ROT IN HELL FOR...

HOLD IT RIGHT THERE, SON!



THE KID WAS SO SURPRISED, I GUESS HE PANICKED...

...HE GOT LOOSE...

SPRRIT!



I COULD HEAR THE TRAIN COMING, BUT I WAS BLIND!

I SCREAMED!

HE TURNED AND LOOKED BACK AT ME LIKE IN A WEIRD SLOW-MOTION DREAM SEQUENCE...

THE KID NEVER KNEW WHAT HIT HIM.

RAK
RAK
RAK
RAK
RAK
RAK

OH MY GOD-- IT'S MY FAULT!

MY FAULT!

MY FADDAH

THAT'S WHEN MY BLOOD PRESSURE WENT 'CHINA SYNDROME'!

SOMETHING HOT AND WET AND OH! SO PAINFUL EXPLODED INSIDE MY SKULL!

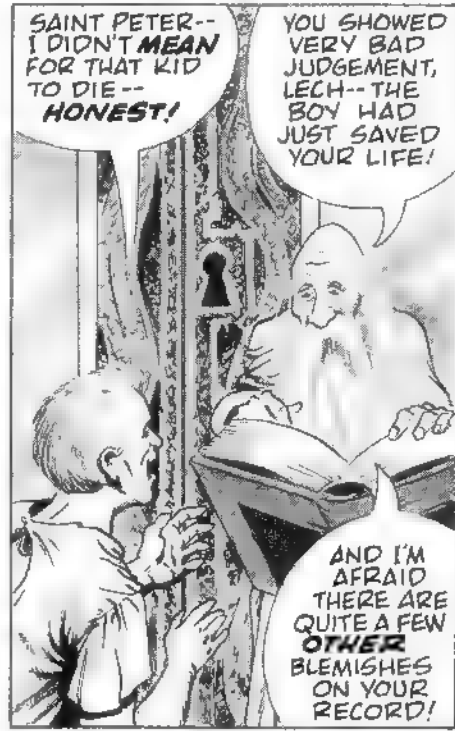
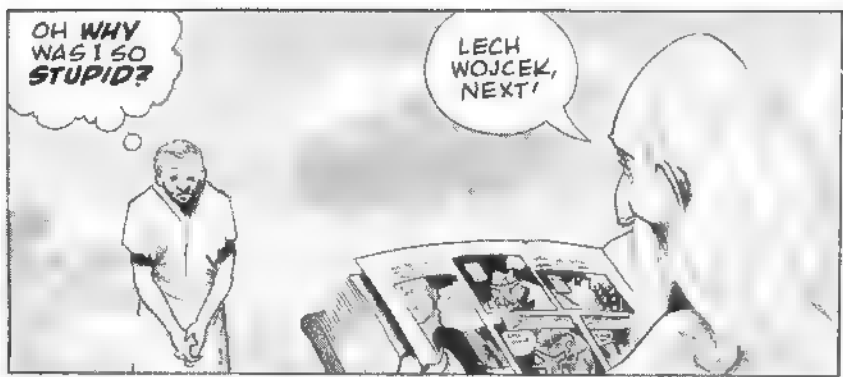
'CEREBRAL HEMORRHAGE', THE DOC CALLED IT...

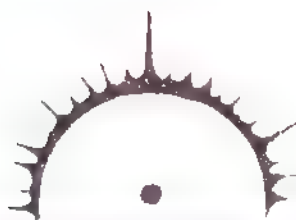
THAT'S HOW I ENDED UP HERE... AND PRETTY SOON I'LL BE UP THERE... JUST ANOTHER SLOB TRYNA' CRASH THOSE PEARLY GATES!

I'M GONNA GET TOSSED OUT ON MY EAR, AIN'T I, FADDAH?

LECH, WHAT HAPPENED TO THAT BOY WAS NOT AN ACT OF PREMEDITATED MURDER ON YOUR PART-

I'M SURE THE LORD, IN ALL HIS MERCIFUL WISDOM, WILL UNDERSTAND.





dragonslander

BY ROBERT RODI

ILLUSTRATED BY KENT WILLIAMS

They called him Alandenarr in the Old Speech, and to the New Men of Jonna he was known as Urrakaier. To the farmers of Western Marilahs he was The Flamegullet, and to the Court at Xanxia he was legendary as Derendenor. The island folks of Ammadoun called him Qint when they dared called him anything at all, and the mountaineers of Renya cursed him as Bugplucker. A girl scout troop in Lower Meremeria called him Bigflap, and to a used obelisk salesman from the housing development at Chrosta he was referred to simply as "Phart."

As for his true name, that was shrouded in mystery, for no dragon would dare embolden a foeman by giving him so potent a weapon. Learn a dragon's name and you could use it in spells against him.

But once you learned it, you had better be on your guard; such was the lesson taught to the wizard Mixenmatch, too late to do him any good. For, just as his cunning and clever stratagems had tricked the dragon of our tale into revealing his true name, the old sorcerer allowed himself a moment to savor his triumph; and in that moment, the giant worm threw his sixteen-ton weight upon Mixenmatch in a fit of absolute pique, and promptly took an extended siesta. Hours later, when his anger cooled, he lumbered up and continued the day.

Mixenmatch did not.

And yet, the wizard had not been completely defeated; for even as the dragon's fatal bulk



careened toward him, he cast upon the air the slightest magick, a mere Spell of Knowing that any novice could have wrought. And as he was rather abruptly freed from his frail corporeality, his little spell flew out of the dragon's cave and was buffeted about by winds until it reached the ear of she for whom it had been intended.

It was as if the air spoke to her: "The dragon's name, my daughter, is Barry."

A year passed, but in the desert Aridwaste, nothing had changed.

"I beg you once again," cried King Rotenaple I, sovereign monarch of the vast kingdom of Faran-wide, as he stood ankle-deep in the sands, "avenge your father's untimely murder! The foul beast who took his innocent life still lives, still savages, still wreaks his perfidy upon my port towns and provinces, moving ever closer to the capital! You, only you, can save us!" He swallowed a sob, and as a result nearly choked on his own sense of melodrama. Several nobles hit him soundly on the back and he recovered.

"*Dragoris*," sighed Wotatease the sorceress. "How *declassé*. I suppose you want me to wrestle it in the mud wearing a wet t-shirt." She sawed a nail file across her fingers, disdainful of the king's small deputation. "I'm sorry. I'm just very busy with my cuticles now, as you can see."

Rotenaple stood his ground. "The Spring Equinox is upon us. He comes for a sacrifice, and we are compelled to gather fifteen of our comeliest virgins to offer to him, to appease his demon wrath. And still you will not give us aid?"

She thought for a moment, and then said, "I might, you know, if I could convince myself that your grief over losing those fifteen virgins were purely paternal." The king blushed here—his decadent private life was an open secret. "Still," said Wotatease, putting away her manicure kit, "I will admit that all the moaning and wailing in the despoiled towns has kept me awake nights. I'll tell you what, if I happen across the dragon sometime, I'll see what I can do."

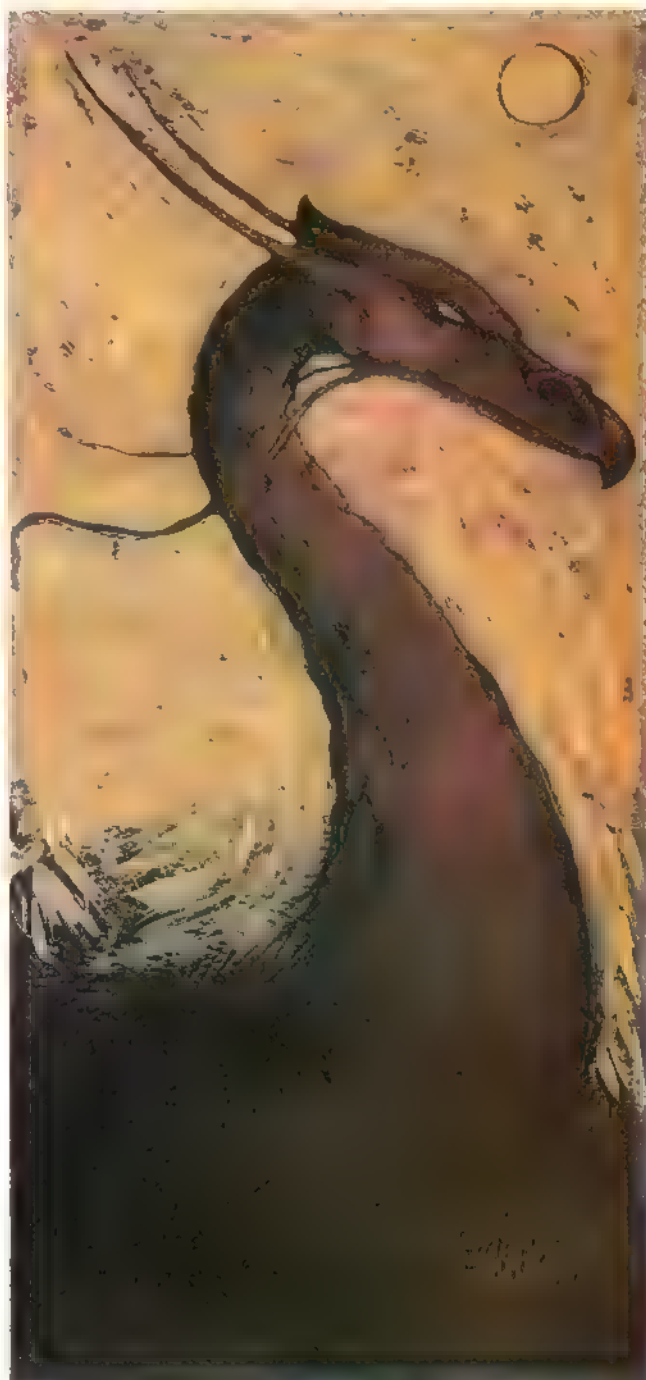
"But—but—"

She rose. "No further discussion, please. If I've said it once, I've said it a thousand times: I'm not my father. I don't risk life and limb for you fatuous primates just because you say 'pretty please.' I'm a wizard, but I'm not *your* wizard. And if you come knocking on my door uninvited just once more, I'll turn the lot of *you* into comely young virgins and take care of two nuisances at once." She strode into the darkness of her cave and her footsteps were immediately inaudible (Wotatease had wall-to-wall broadloom, something of a luxury in a pre-industrial dark age.)

The grand vizier deemed it safe to speak against her. "Your majesty, it appears the shaman's daughter affords us no aid, curse her black heart. Are we then doomed?"

"Nay, good Kissezas," said the king with a grin that would have shamed the most outrageous B-movie villain; "I have a plan..."

Wotatease was very wise indeed, and was renowned for the depth of her understanding; and yet she was in some areas remarkably, and perhaps intentionally, thick-headed. For instance, against all the best advice, she insisted upon sun-tanning between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., claiming





those were the prime hours for the most even distribution of color, and that the ozone layer at any rate had at least seventy-three hundred years before anyone had to worry about it. And so, not two weeks having passed since her unpleasant interview with the king, she spread herself on the sands outside her cave and began soaking up the rays. Her pet aberration, Phyllis, sat in the shade beneath a nearby boulder, shaking its head sadly.

Hardly twenty minutes had passed when, to Wotatease, it seemed as though the sun had been

eclipsed. Darkness dropped over her like a wet blanket, and she shivered once before sitting upright. A great wind hit her in the face, and she heard a sound like sails flapping before she could focus her eyes.

The dragon was before her, wings gently folding, muscles contracting as they shifted from the demands of flight to those of rest. A menacingly quiet hiss escaped his cavernous maw, and his blood-red eyes blinked twice before he spoke. His voice was full of ire.

You are the enchantressss?"

Wotatease rolled her eyes. "I hate that, I really do. Being stereotyped by my occupation, I mean. Go to a party, everyone asks, 'What do you do? And what do you do?' As if that were the best indicator of a person's identity! Why not say, 'Hello, nice to meet you, what are you feeling right now?'"

The dragon hissed again. "And—what are you feeling? Fear?"

She crossed her legs. "Well, to be perfectly

ressss," he said. "It annoyssss me. I would deal with you as befitssss an enemy."

Enemy?" said Wotatease. "I think you're mistaken. We've never met. Trust me. I'd remember you."

"We have not met, yet you have sssspoken of me," explained the dragon. "You have sssspread liessss. You have called my abilitiessss into quesssstion. In the passsst few dayssss, I have



honest, I'm feeling a bit peeved that you're blocking my sun."

The dragon raised his head. "I ssssee you mean to make ssssport of me. I sssshall not permit it." Making a great show of it, he breathed a tongue of scorching flame at her, then quickly extinguished it. "I trussst that will demonssstrate the folly of arousssing my wrath."

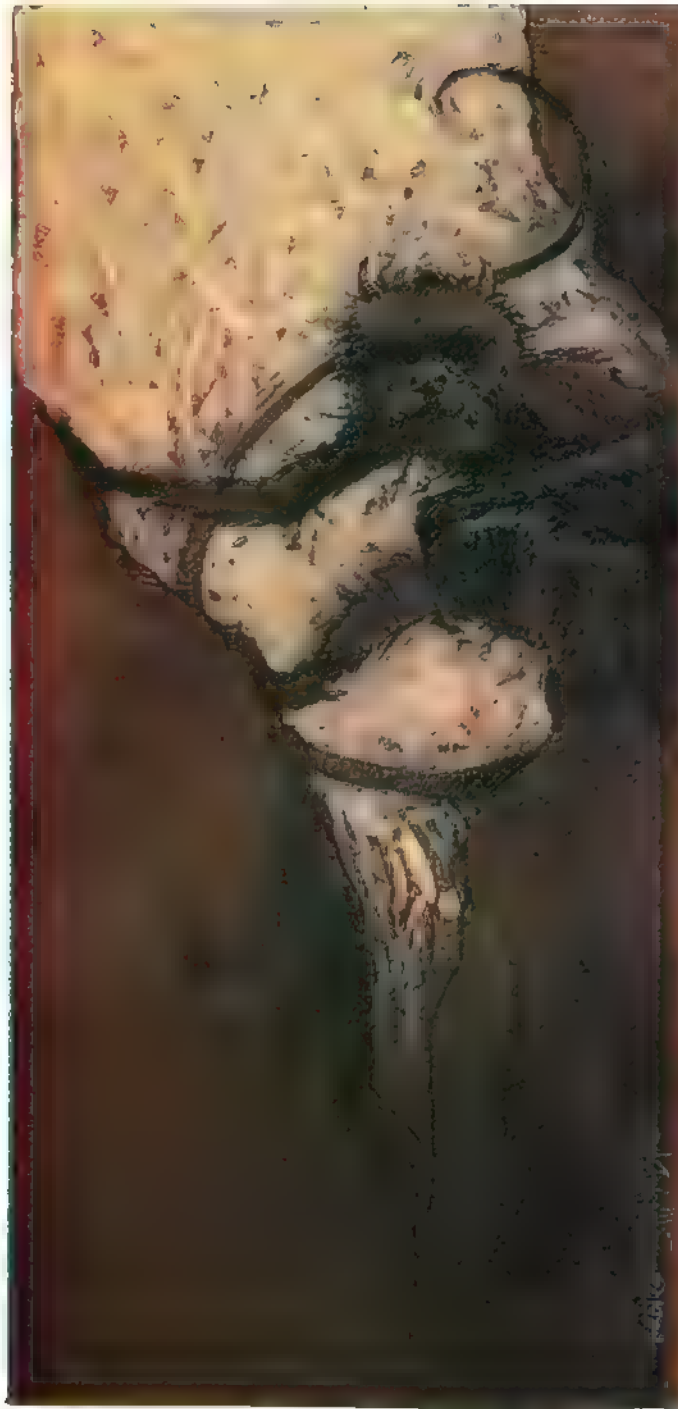
Wotatease quickly examined her singed arms and belly. "Deal with it!" she exclaimed in amazement. "This is the best tan I've ever had! Now, if I lie on my stomach, could you do that again! Wait—let me put a little lotion on." She awkwardly applied a palmful to her back. "I can't believe this," she muttered. "Your breath is better than a whole week in the upper 90's."

The dragon rose to his full height, a terrifying thing to behold. "Ceasssse thy prattle, enchant-

been accused of devouring common cattle, and it issss widely ssssaid that my hidden treassssure is naught more than a few hunkssss of pyrite and quartz and a large imagination. And I have even been accused of having traded my true name to a local human wench in return for a particularly sssatisfyssing sssscratch under my ehin. Assss a resssult, my peerssss have forssssaken me. I am denied the ssssanctuary of The Aerie. The Congressss of Dragons hassss called me Coward and Betrayer of Ssssecretssss. Thissss territory is ssssoon to be taken from me."

Wotatease put away her lotion. "That's unfortunate," she said, rolling over on her stomach. "But before you go, could you oblige?"

In furious resignation, the dragon spat another pillar of flame at her near-naked body. When it dissipated, she jumped into a crouch and looked over her shoulder. "I can't see from here," she said. "Phyllis! How do I look from behind? Brown enough?"



Phyllis, who had been quaking behind the boulder ever since the dragon had landed, now shot toward the cave as fast as any of its species had ever moved before.

"I want to know why you have defamed me thussss," said the dragon almost pathetically. "I wissssh to know what could have caused ssssuch manifesssst cruelty in you toward a poor creature whom you had never even met. And after you have explained yourssself, I will devour you limb by limb. Sssso there!"

Wotatease stood, brushing sand off her legs. "I'm sorry, you *do* have me confused with someone else. I can assure, much though I may find your kind dull and ridiculous, I've never said a

word against dragons in my life, and certainly not against you in particular. Except to tell the king that you kept me awake nights. But of course, I'm awake most nights anyway, so it hardly matters."

"Thissss king claimssss you ssssay much worsssse of me," the dragon said. "He hassss recounted to me many sssslanderssss which you have sssspread againsssst me. He claimssss you are the architect of my ruin."

"Oh, he does, does he?" said Wotatease with sudden interest. "Well, that explains things."

"It doessss?"

"Certainly." She put on her cape of royal purple. "You've got a habit of eating young virgins. That happens to be a section of the population in which the king has a rather personal interest. He wanted to be rid of you, and he wanted me to help him. I refused. So to revenge himself on me and still achieve that end, he spread some rumors about you and blamed me for them, knowing you'd come after me to avenge yourself. Then, ideally, the two of us, would finish each other off. Quite clever, really."

"I do not believe you. You sssseek my ruin becausssse it wassss I who sssstruck down your father, Mixenmatch!"

"Not at all. It was too bad, of course, but Dad did ask for it, didn't he?"

"Then you deny everything?"

"Categorically and steadfastly." She looked at the sky. "Still a bit strong out here. I'm going to dehydrate unless I get indoors. Good afternoon." She turned to leave him.

"One moment," he said; "I have not eaten you assss I promised."

"Never mind, the tan was enough, thank you." She continued walking.

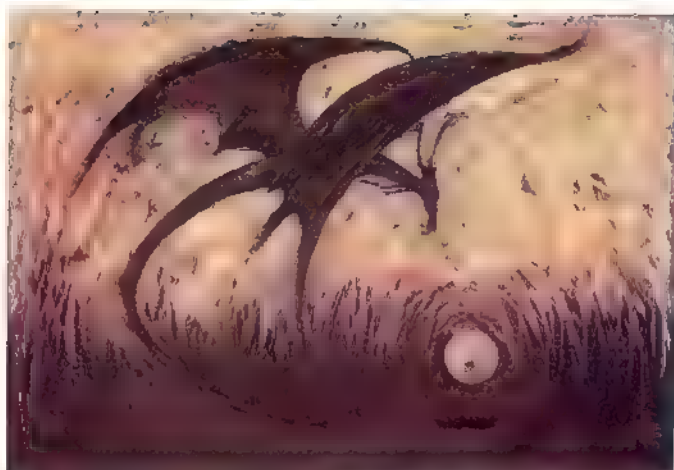
With a roar, the dragon threw himself upon her. At the last moment, however, she made herself intangible, and when the worm hit the ground, she was standing on his head, quite cross.

That," she said through clenched teeth, "was possibly the *dumbest* you could have done just at that moment. I was rather pleased with my tan and feeling grateful to you, but that's all over now...*Barry*."

The dragon's pupils dilated in fear. "My name ...you possssssss my true name!"

"Yes, *Barry*, I know your name, *Barry*. Isn't it a shame you didn't just leave well enough alone, *Barry*? Well, *Barry*, this is what I want you to do: first," she said, placing her hands on his temples to reinforce the mystic command, "I want you to fly to Xanxia and sit on King Rotenaple. Then, I want you to fly to The Aerie and make a full confession to the Congress of Dragons of everything you've been accused of. And then I want you to fly far, far away and never return. Understood, *Barry*? Any questions, *Barry*?" Sparks flew from her hands.





He hissed in an agony of frustration, climbed to all fours and leaped into flight. Wotatease floated gently to the ground. She watching him flap away until he was far enough from her to make a vigil pointless, and then she turned at last to enter her cave.

And thus was Faranwide spared the further ravages of the dragon Barry, variously called Al-adenarr, Urrakaier, The Flamegullet, Deredenor, Qint, Bugplucker, Bigflap and Phart; and although the Congress of Dragons sent in a replacement almost immediately, who assumed all of those names and more, there was still a feeling of gratitude toward the new national heroine, Wotatease the Bronze, who took advantage of the adulation—and of the empty throne—to have herself crowned queen. “If I don’t rule here,” she explained to Phyllis, “the people who do will just keep bothering me.” The history of her reign is a tale for another time—but we will tell you this much: the new postage stamps looked *great*.



TOADSWART

SYNOPSIS

"What is this Darkness, this consummate Evil pervading all...the now forsaken castle chambers...the landscapes and villages beyond?" So in the year 982 A.D., from a lonely cell, contemplates the dwarf Toadswart, retainer of Castle Amplestone.

Had it commenced with the mysterious disappearance of the castle's old Lord? Certainly this affected his heir and regent, Prince Waxwroth. Suspecting the country's ruler, the King of the First Dominion, of treacherous designs upon Amplestone province, Waxwroth used knowledge gained with wealth brutally wrung from his subjects to call upon Dark Forces and give life to a huge and hideous creation of rag, filth, and clay...the Golem.

But while Waxwroth raged over the sudden approach of the King's army, which he considered proof that someone within Amplestone had alerted the Ruler to his plans, the Creature escaped the subterranean cell in which it was held. And not long after, Rupert, the Prince's young son—whose coming investiture would also validate Waxwroth as Lord of Amplestone—went plunging to his doom from the castle's clock tower into the stone courtyard far, far below.

d'AMPLESTONE

A GOTHIC TALE of HORROR & MAGICK
BY TIM A. CONRAD

CHAPTER IV

...TO
THE LORD HATH
GONE THE SPIRIT,
AND TO THE EARTH
WE COMMEND THE
BODY.

ASHES to ASHES



So Death Himself had come to Amplestone...striking the Harshes Blow. And by the time we bid poor Rupert our most Reluctant and Final Farewell, the Army of the King had arrived as well, and was preparing to put the Manor to Siege.

Death had come...palpable as the Pain in my Heart, tangible as the oaken box in the cold ground at my feet. And the Hatred I could see in Lord Wamwottle's eyes told me that like the King and his Troops- Death was prepared to tarry.



"DUST
TO DUST.
AMEN."

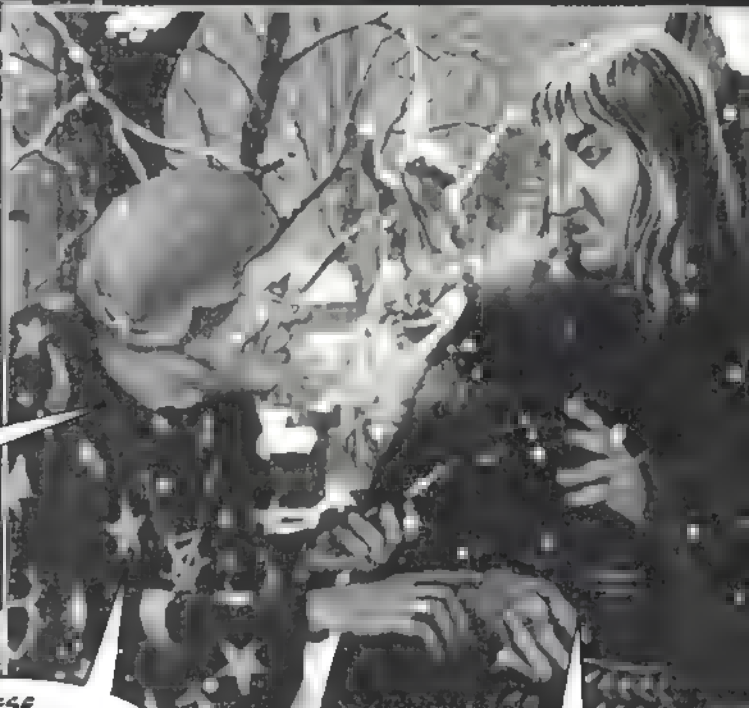


Not was I alone in my concern. For though Waxworth was lost to his Rage, and Counselor Bitterburr and Captain Flurry to their Sorrow... there was one other who felt a chill deeper and colder than the first Winter Snow which fell so steadily.

Still, what I overheard as we returned to the Manor...

...gave to me a measure of Comfort, rather than confirming my misgivings.

...THIS SILVER KNIFE, MY FRIEND. FOR YOUR OWN DEFENSE, IF NOT THE SALVATION OF AMPLESTONE.



THESE MALEVOLENT MACHINATIONS REQUIRE SUSTENANCE. WE ARE ALL FODDER. SOON OR LATE, THIS DEMENTED HERDS-MAN WILL COME FOR YOU AS WELL. PLEASE, TAKE THE KNIFE.

I'M AN ARTIST, LACKNOSE, NOT A SOLDIER. I WOULDN'T KNOW HOW TO USE A WEAPON EVEN IF IT WAS LARGE ENOUGH TO BE OF VALUE. AS FOR THAT TINY BLADE! IT WOULDN'T EVEN...

I passed on and heard no more. Like Ulick the Gravesman, I had my own duties to attend.

in the council
chamber...

...PREPARED
TO AVENGE MY
SON'S MURDER,
CAPTAIN
FLURRY!

MY LORD...
ONLY
TELL ME
HOW!

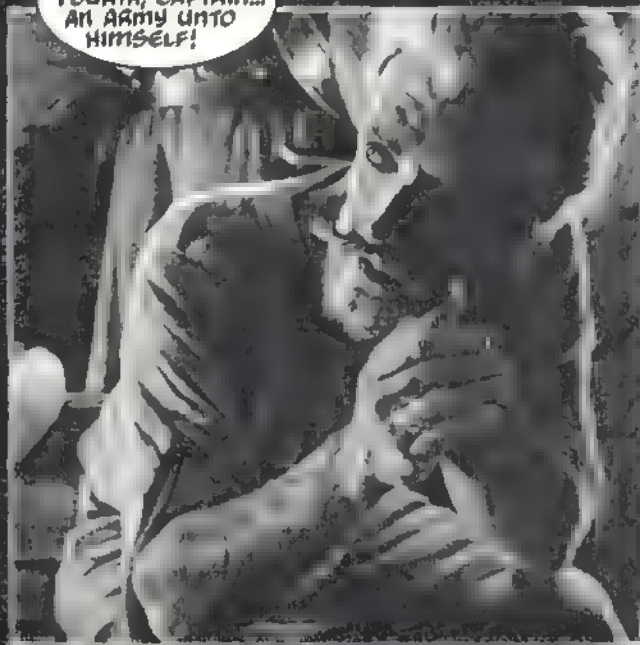


PREPARE
YOURSELF AND YOUR THREE
BEST MEN. TONIGHT YOU SHALL
NOT ONLY AVENGE YOUNG
RUPERT... YOU SHALL TRIUMPH
OVER AN ENTIRE
ARMY.

THREE
MEN,
MY LORD?



THERE
WILL BE A
FOURTH, CAPTAIN...
AN ARMY UNTO
HIMSELF!



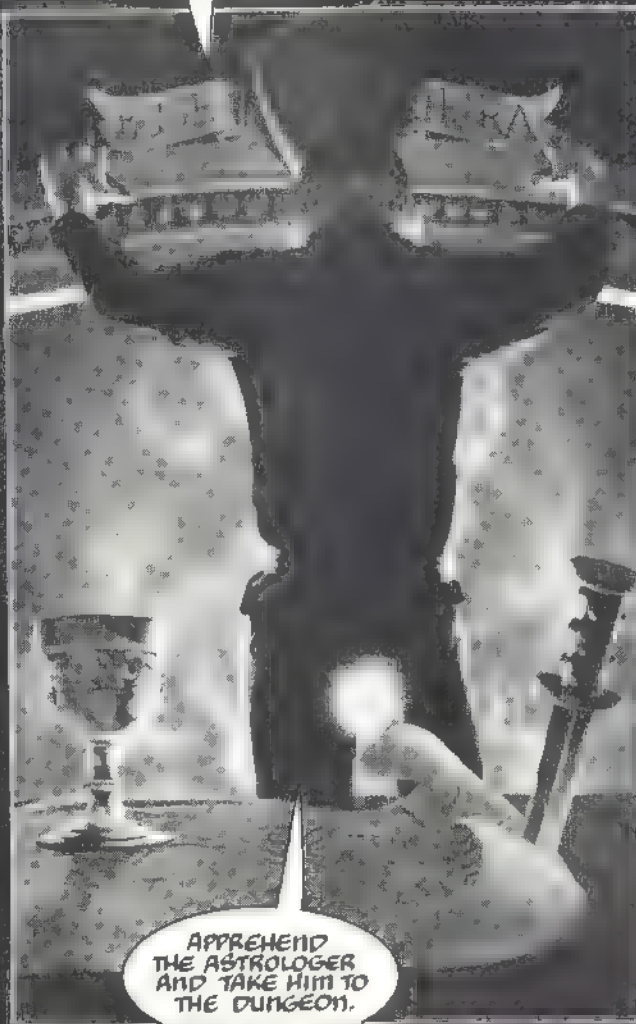
SURELY
YOU'RE NOT
CONSIDERING THAT
HORROR AGAIN!? YOU
SHOULD HAVE LET ME
HAVE AT IT WITH THE
SLEDGE AS I DESIRED
WHEN WE FINALLY FOUND
IT STUMBLING BLINDLY
THROUGH THE
CATACOMBS.



NOW
YOU THINK TO
LOOSE IT AGAIN!
GOD HELP US ALL!
SURELY, NAUGHT
BUT *THAT*
MONSTROUS THING
MURDERED YOUR
SON!

NOT SURELY
AT ALL! THE GOLEM HAD
NO MORE TO DO WITH THE BOY'S
DEATH THAN THE GOD YOU SO
VAINLY APPEAL TO FOR AID! RUPERT
WAS MURDERED BY THE SAME
DISLOYAL DOG WHO BETRAYED
US TO THE KING!

AN OBVIOUS
ATTEMPT TO DISHEARTEN
AND DISTRACT US AS THEY
PREPARE TO DESTROY US! BUT
TODAY WE SHALL SEE HOW
TREACHERY IS TURNED
AGAINST ITSELF!



APPREHEND
THE ASTROLOGER
AND TAKE HIM TO
THE DUNGEON.

TOADSWART CONTINUES NEXT ISSUE

DID YOU READ THIS, CHIEF?
THE FROZEN SUPER SPERM IS NOT IN
THE MAGOO-MAGOO TEMPLE ANYMORE! LISTEN:
"AFTER THE LAST ANTIMAGOO TERRORISTS' RAID
ON THE TEMPLE, WHEN TWO OF THE THREE
REMAINING BOTTLES OF OUR DIVINE PROPHET'S
SPERM HAD BEEN DESTROYED, HIS EMINENCE
CARDINAL LEGER DECIDED TO HIDE THE
LAST RELIC IN ONE OF THE CITY'S NUMEROUS
BANKS." I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW THAT THOSE
AIR-BAGS HAD ATTACKED THE TEMPLE. WHY
DO THEY NEED THAT SPERM, ANYWAY?

YOU ARE GARBAGE,
G.P.

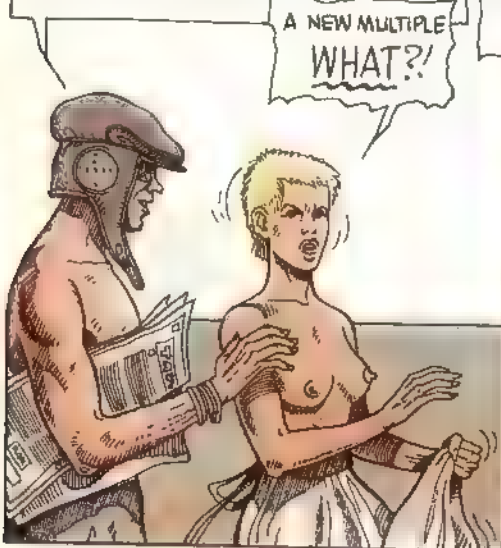
GIMME A BREAK, CHIEF! YOU DON'T
HAVE TO CALL ME NAMES ONLY BECAUSE
I DON'T KNOW THE LATEST NEWS.



OH, THAT... I'VE WARNED YOU BEFORE NOT
TO COUNT ON ME FOR ONE OF THOSE NEW
MULTIPLE ORGASMS.

YOU ARE
DEFINITELY
GARBAGE...

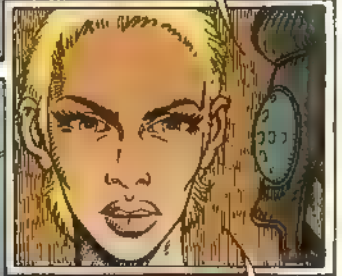
A NEW MULTIPLE
WHAT?!



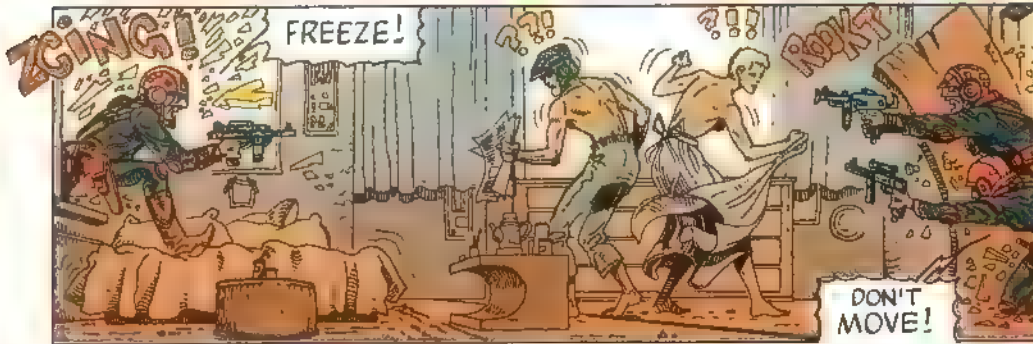
HEY, LOOK!
THE P.P.S.!!!



WHOM ARE THEY ESCORTING THIS TIME?



JUDGING BY THEIR NUMBER, IT HAS TO BE ONE OF THE BIG BIGGIES.



TAKE IT EASY, MARIO.

THIS BEAUTIFUL LADY IS A VERY OLD FRIEND OF MINE. AREN'T YOU, HONEY?

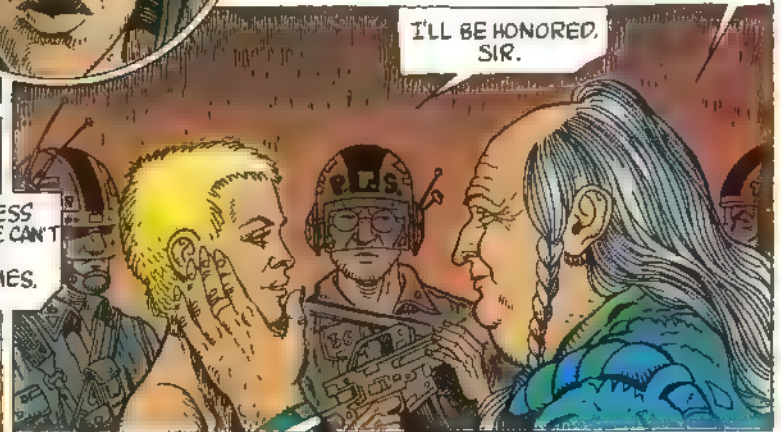
MR. KOLOKOWSKY? I CAN'T BELIEVE IT...

KOLOKOWSKY?! LACIUS KOLOKOWSKY! THE OWNER OF THE ROYAL CITY BANK!

YOU ONCE PULLED A VERY GOOD JOB FOR ME, MY DEAR; AND AS I AM IN RATHER A NASTY JAM RIGHT NOW I WOULD LIKE YOU TO HELP ME AGAIN.

I'LL BE HONORED, SIR.

EXCUSE THE RUDENESS OF MY BOYS, BUT ONE CAN'T BE TOO CAUTIOUS IN THESE TROUBLED TIMES.



FINE, FINE NOW, LET ME FILL YOU IN, SWEETHEART. I'VE GOT THREE BANK ROBBERS SITTING IN MY 4TH AVE AND 37TH STREET BRANCH, WITH MY WIFE AS A HOSTAGE.

THEY WANT A FREE PASSAGE TO THE NEAREST VENTILATION CORRIDOR THROUGH WHICH THEY WILL DISAPPEAR UNDERGROUND FOREVER.

WOULDN'T YOUR BOYS HANDLE THIS KIND OF MROGLIO BETTER?

OH, NO, NO, NO, MY DEAR THEY HAVE ALREADY SURROUNDED THE BANK, BUT THAT'S ALL THEY CAN DO. I NEED SOMEBODY LIKE YOU, WHO CAN DEAL WITH THOSE RUFFIANS WITHOUT LAS-GUNS.

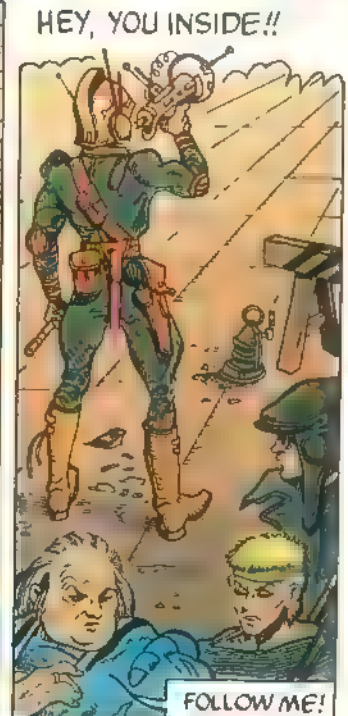
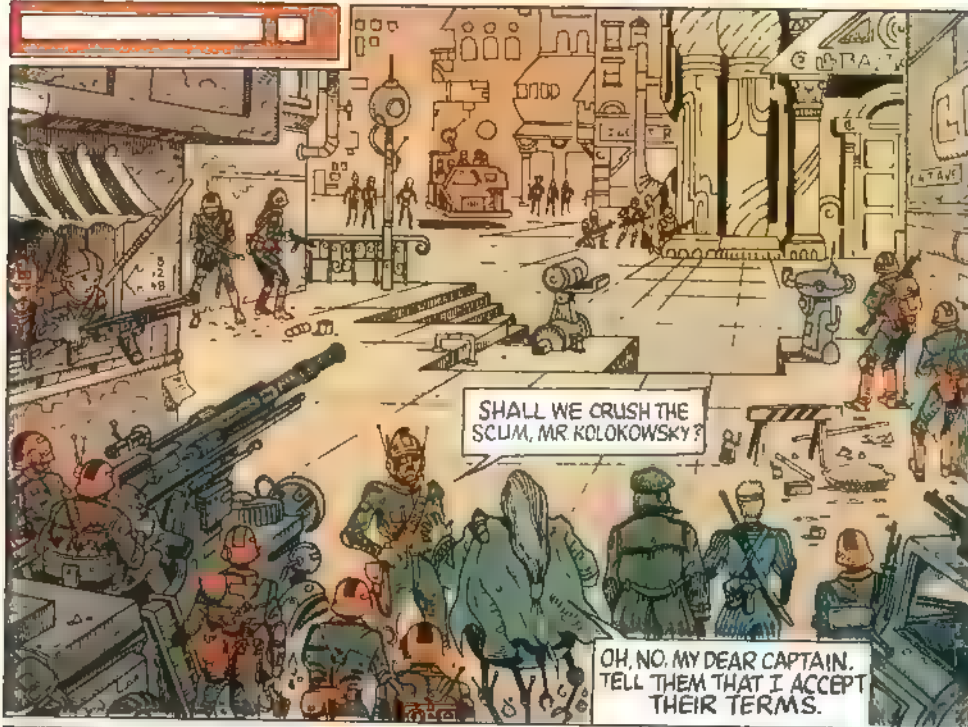
WHAT?! NO LAS?!? YOU DON'T MEAN TO...

YES! WE SHALL AMBLUSH THEM IN THE VENTILATION CORRIDOR, THE ONLY PLACE IN THE CITY WHERE THE "HOT-STAFF" IS NO-NO, BECAUSE OF THE BUILT-IN BOMB MECHANISM WHICH WOULD BLOW UP THE SPECIFIC ENDANGERED VENTILATION CELL, THUS PROTECTING THE WHOLE AIR PROVIDING SYSTEM.

BUT WE KNOW NOTHING ABOUT THOSE CORRIDORS ONE CAN GET EASILY LOST THERE. EVEN THE COPS AVOID THE PLACE...

I SHALL LEAD YOU, YOUNG MAN YOU CAN RELY ON ME. I KNOW THE UNDERGROUND AS GOOD AS THE PALM OF MY HAND. I WAS PRETTY BAD IN MY DAYS. ASK YOUR BOSS ABOUT IT, IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME.

HE, HE, HE... NOW, ARM YOURSELF AND LET'S GO!



THIS SERVICE PASSAGE
LEADS TO THE MAIN CORRIDOR
THROUGH WHICH THEY HAVE
TO PASS. LET'S WASTE NO TIME.

HURRY
UP!

HOLY MAGOO, IT'S A REAL
LABYRINTH.

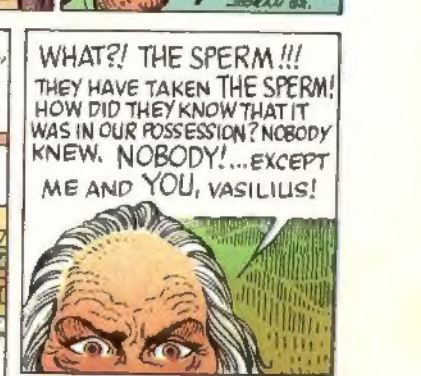
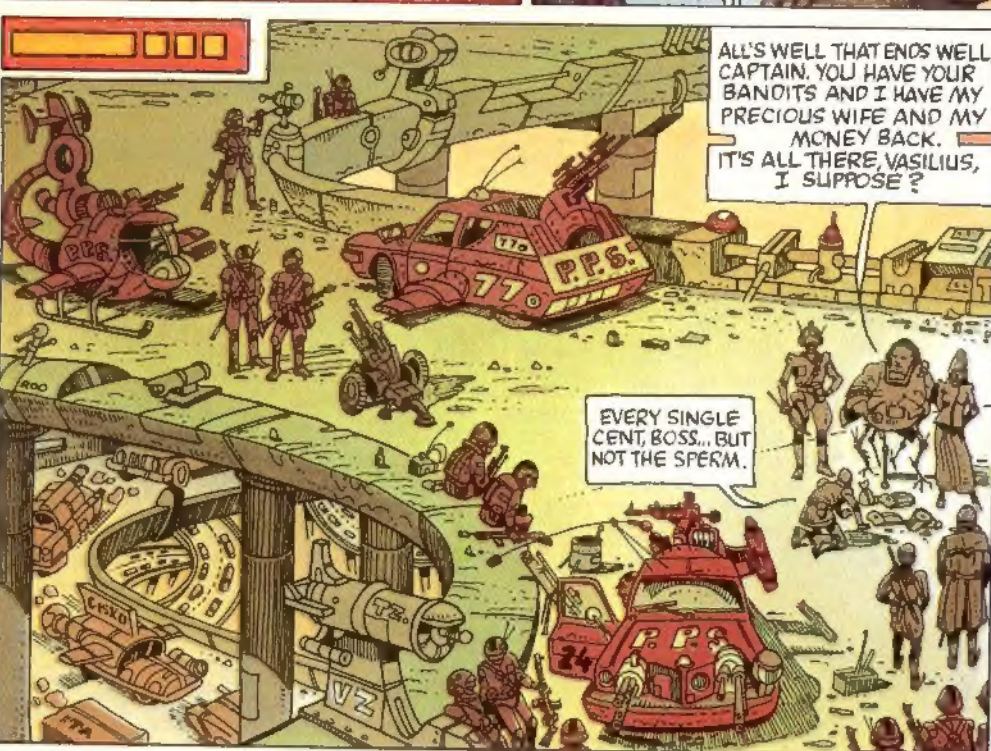
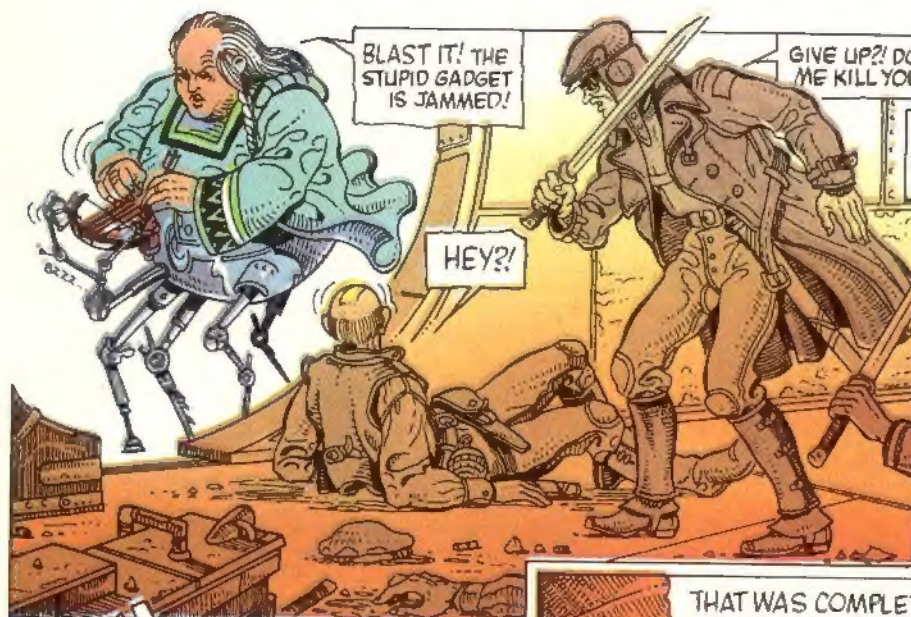
SSSH! HERE THEY
ARE.

KILL THEM ALL!
I WANT NO
SURVIVORS !!!

NO! NOT THE GUN, KAZO!
USE YOUR MATCHETE!

TWANG

THE HELL HE WILL!



SHUT UP, YOU... YOU... TAKE HIM AWAY, CAPTAIN!

OH, NO, MR. KOLOKOWSKY!
OH, NO, NO, NO...



...AND I KNOW WHERE!



BUT... WHERE IS THE BOTTLE?

MAYBE THEY HAD IT SOMEWHERE BEFORE THE AMBUSH?

EXACTLY...



HOW DID YOU GUESS?

THERE WERE TOO MANY COINCIDENCES: KOLOKOWSKY KNEW THE PASSAGE TOO WELL; THE "ACCIDENTAL" PRESENCE OF MRS. KOLOKOWSKY IN THE BANK; THEIR ZEALOUS EAGERNESS TO KILL ALL THOSE POOR AIR-BAGS, WHO HAD ACTUALLY BEEN HIRED BY THEM AND THUS WERE VERY INCONVENIENT WITNESSES, AND IT WAS EVIDENT THAT THE LAST ONE RECOGNIZED HIM.



SO YOU WANTED THE HOLY SPERM TO REJUVENATE YOURSELF, YOU FAT, OLD BASTARD!!!

YOU STUPID COP!
YOU FOOL!
I WANTED IT FOR ALL OF YOU!
TO SAVE YOU!!!



THOSE PETTY LITTLE MAGOC PRIESTS'VE BEEN USING IT ONLY TO PRODUCE THEIR PETTY LITTLE POPES! I WANTED TO CREATE A SUPER-MAN! HE WOULD HAVE CHANGED THIS GARBAGE CITY!!!

HE WOULD HAVE...

ENOUGH!
LOCK THEM UP!



...HE WOULD HAVE SAVED US!
SAVED YOU!...

CAPTAIN O'BANNON SPEAKING. I'D LIKE TO TALK TO HIS EMINENCE, CARDINAL LEGER.

AS THE MAN SAID, CHIEF, ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL. WE HAVE THE BOTTLE, AND THE CARDINAL IS KNOWN AS A VERY GENEROUS MAN.



THERE!



YOU DIRTY...



DON'T BE SILLY, OLD MAN.

I'LL TAKE THE BOTTLE NOW, SISTER.



HALLO, YOUR EMINENCE,
YOU CAN SEND YOUR MEN
TO PICK UP THE BOTTLE,
I'VE GOT IT!

DAMMIT!
THAT BOZO WILL
SUCK ALL OUR
CREAM!



O.K., PLEXUS, THE KINDERGARTEN
GAME IS OVER.
HAND IT TO
POPPA.



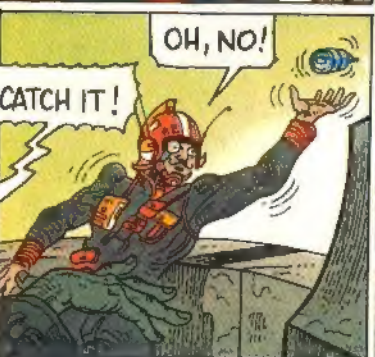
DO IT, G.P.! DO IT!
GIVE HIM YOUR
NASTY CURVE...



YOU WANT IT?...

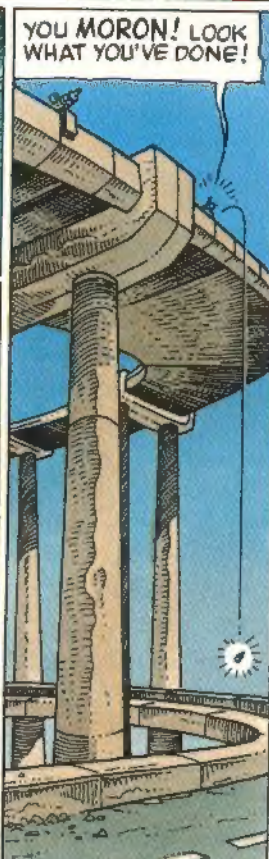


WAIT!

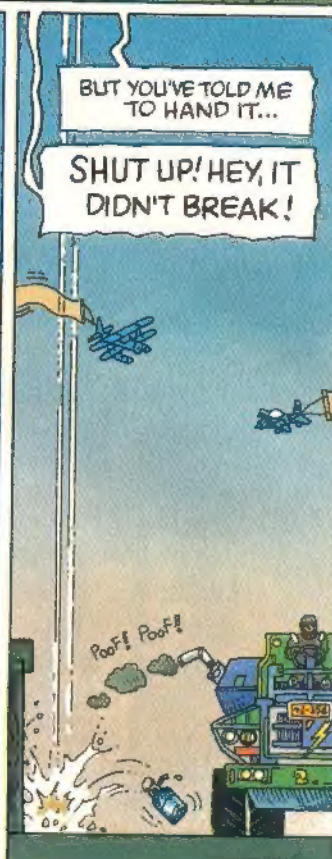


OH, NO!

CATCH IT!



YOU MORON! LOOK
WHAT YOU'VE DONE!



BUT YOU'VE TOLD ME
TO HAND IT...

SHUT UP! HEY, IT
DIDN'T BREAK!



HURRY UP, MEN!
GET IT!

OOOH, NOOOO!
THE BLOODY TRUCK!..

POOF!

PooF! PooF!



ARRRGHHH!!!
I'M GONNA KILL YOU
PLEXUS! PLEXUS?!...

SKRNGH!



PLEEXUUUS!!!
WHERE IS THE
SON OF A BITCH?!